
SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANT WORKERS IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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DMAG ASIA PACIFIC

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASEAN-ACT	ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking
CLMT	Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand
CMHI	Compulsory Migrant Health Insurance
CoO	Country of Origin
CoD	Country of Destination
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease-2019

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DMA-G	Developing Markets Associates – Global
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNCC	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PROMISE	Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
QC	Quarantine Centre
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics
VFI	Village Focus International
WaSH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

GLOSSARY

Returnee Migrant	
Re-migration	
Re-employment	
Retraining	
Host country	
Regular migration	
Irregular migration	
Domestic work	
High-income	
Low-income	
Hospitality	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights the key impacts of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the migrant worker community by undertaking mixed methods research including a sample of 409 returnee migrant workers. The aim of this research is to fill gaps in the current understanding of the socioeconomic impacts on the migrant worker experience to provide recommendations to the Lao government, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. These recommendations seek to relieve the immediate effects of COVID-19 felt by migrant workers, build resilience and reduce vulnerability of migrant workers and leverage the economic potential of returning migrant workers for the Laotian economy.

Lao People's Democratic Republic has seen a significant return of migrants since January 2020, with the Immigration Bureau of Thailand reporting that 284,180 Laotian nationals departed Thailand¹ from March 2020 to April 2021. The influx of returning migrant workers has increased in recent months due to the rapid spread of the Delta strain in Thailand.

This research was conducted using an initial desk review to establish gaps and identify research questions then a quantitative survey with a sample of 409 was used in conjunction with key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to form the key findings. The KIIs and FGDs involved employers, CSO representatives and returnee migrant workers.

1.1 Findings

It is clear from these findings that the large numbers of migrants returning from abroad faced several challenges as a result of COVID-19 in their country of destination (CoD) and that they will encounter significant difficulty in their reintegration to Laotian community. The primary source of this difficulty will be economic pressure from unemployment. In addition to this, they will face social pressures as returning migrants experience negative attitudes from the broader community. The findings from this research have been distilled into six main themes identified by the IOM as part of the larger PROMISE programme.

Debt and remittances. Remittances are a critical part of the migrant worker experience with many migrants placing a significant concern on the amount of money they could send home. Our findings indicate that most sent money home regularly and that this money was spent largely on immediate needs of the receiving households. Migrants used a diverse range of methods to make sure these remittances arrived in an accessible method to their families because the majority were only able to receive in cash forms. Very few changed their remittance methods since COVID-19 began affecting the region. Debt was a less common experience among the returnee migrant workers surveyed. Because of the burgeoning cost of migrating from Lao People's Democratic Republic to nearby countries many were forced to take out debt to fund their initial migration and many more returned with debt. This particularly affected female migrants who were more likely to have outstanding debt and be concerned about repaying it.

Employment and employment protection. Steps have been made by the Lao and Thai governments to

¹ <https://www.immigration.go.th>

regularize migration and work opportunities yet there remains a long way to go; nearly half of this sample of returnee migrants did not have proper work documentation. This pattern of irregular migration places many migrant workers in precarious and vulnerable situations without proper social or employment protections. Despite high concern about this among CSOs, migrants displayed low levels of understanding about the role and importance of these protections and support services. These findings indicated that most job opportunities were pursued through familial or colloquial relationships rather than standard recruitment channels. From this sample, the official structures for employment and employment protection currently lack support from the migrant community who tend to use informal channels because of the greater flexibility that it affords.

Access to information, social protection and services.

Return and reintegration

Re-migration and re-employment including ethical recruitment

Skills development and retraining

1.2 Recommendations

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale

COVID-19 has had a significant impact across South East Asia and the world. Its effects have rippled through all communities and peoples and yet its effects are felt differently by each community. To properly support and protect communities their experience must be comprehensively understood. Migrant workers from Lao are one such community. For decision makers and institutions to be able to develop successful responses to COVID-19 that serve migrant workers, they must fully realise the unique impacts of the pandemic on human and labour mobility within Lao People's Democratic Republic. Furthermore, migrant workers have a considerable impact on the Laotian economy and proper management of migrant worker policy could allow them to play a significant role in the larger economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has affected and is impacted by human mobility. Developing successful responses to COVID-19 that protect migrant workers and their communities depends on a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on human mobility, including labour mobility across borders. Lao People's Democratic Republic has seen a significant return of migrants since January 2020, with the Immigration Bureau of Thailand reporting that 284,180 Laotian nationals departed Thailand² from March 2020 to April 2021. The influx of returning migrant workers has increased in recent months due to the rapid spread of the Delta strain in Thailand. This study seeks to understand the issues faced by Lao workers within Thailand during the pandemic, and the subsequent employment (market and returning migrant worker) needs within Lao People's Democratic Republic and the associated need to support returned migrants with skills development, social protection and employment support as they navigate their return into the Lao economy.

1.1.1 Context in South East Asia

Migrant workers constitute a sizeable share of the labour force in key countries of destination in South East Asia. Thailand has approximately 3.9 million migrant workers mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. It is estimated that the economic contribution of migrant workers ranged from 4.3 per cent to 6.6 per cent of Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017.³

Thailand is the destination for most Lao migrant workers. IOM estimated that 900,000⁴ Lao migrants lived

² <https://www.immigration.go.th>

³ OECD, 2017: <https://www.oecd.org/migration/immigrant-workers-do-contribute-significantly-to-thailand-economy.html>

⁴ United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2019: *International Migration 2019: Report*

abroad in 2019, with Thailand the most popular destination. Other sources including UNDESA (2017)⁵ indicates 1.3 million Lao migrants were living abroad. Thailand offers higher wages, with the Thai minimum wage more than double the Lao monthly minimum wage of LAK 900,000 minimum wage⁶ (around US\$92 at 22 September 2021). Workers are attracted often to more highly skilled opportunities in the construction and manufacturing sectors as well as agriculture. Domestic work, and in the larger cities and some border provinces, entertainment work also offer opportunities for Lao women albeit often through informal channels.

In recent years, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has taken concrete measures to consolidate its national policies, laws and procedures to more effectively manage labour migration outflow, including through revision of Decree 245 –Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad⁷, which was endorsed by Prime Minister in May 2020 and officially launched in December same year; the greater inclusiveness of labour migration in recently finalized 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021 –2025); and line ministry's plan to revise the labour sending Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic (currently in 2016 version), to reflect the changing situation and identify newly emerged needs. Nonetheless, a comprehensive mechanism has not yet established to address migrant population's needs, including but not limited to: skills development that match market needs, re-skilling and up-skilling of returned migrants, skills testing and certification, social protection system, employment support, among the others.

1.2 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the livelihoods of migrant workers across CLMT. In Lao People's Democratic Republic, more than 285,000 migrants have returned to the country since January 2020, as a result of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19⁸. Government officials at village and district levels, as well as community and national radio stations. However as migrant workers continue to return to the country, many returnee migrants fall through gaps and are left with limited information on safe migration, particularly on return and reintegration.

As per Prime Minister's Notice and National initial COVID-19 Taskforce requirement, returning migrant workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic must go through a mandatory 14-day quarantine in a

⁵

<https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Social%20and%20Human%20Sciences/publications/laos.pdf>

⁶ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_735106.pdf

⁷ <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-chief-mission-met-lao-minister-labour-and-social-welfare>

⁸ [According to the official statistics of the Immigration Bureau of Thailand 284,180 Laotian nationals departed Thailand between March 2020 and April 2021.](#)

quarantine centre (QC). In August 2021, this requirement was updated to state that returnees must continue to quarantine at district or village QCs for another 14 days. As of January 2021, there are 18 provincial quarantine centres in each province across the country, including Vientiane Capital KM27, Savanakheth KM4, Champasack, Luang Prabang, among the others. Returning migrant workers may also quarantine in one of the district or community level QCs, depends on their entry points upon return. According to official communication with QC management team, since December 2020, the KM27 QC has been receiving 30-40 returned migrant workers on a daily basis, mainly from Thailand. This number is expected to increase as the Government is in the process of repatriating a total of 2,000 Lao People's Democratic Republic migrant workers from Malaysia on a weekly basis starting from 17 January 2021. As of 16 September 2021, there are 112 designated QCs and 55 designated hotels throughout the country.

To address the return and reintegration needs of migrant workers, IOM provided 2,200 returned and aspirant migrant workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic with information on COVID-19 prevention and safe migration through QCs. In addition, IOM estimate that up to 50,000 returnee migrants have been reached people have been provided with safe migration information through loud speaker broadcasts at QCs.

Key development partners in Lao People's Democratic Republic, including IOM, World Vision and World Health Organisation (WHO) are recording the number of migrant arrivals at QCs across the country. For example, World Vision in Lao People's Democratic Republic has been recording approximately 20-30 returned migrant workers daily at Savanakheth QC in January 2021. This leads to an average of 1,000 returnees per QC at provincial level. The number of returning migrant workers continued to increase significantly throughout the year, and by September 2021, Savanakheth QC had 2 provincial QCs and 15 district level QCs. A modestly higher number of arrivals were recorded on average in August.

The number of migrant workers being received by QCs has highlighted the need for additional support to accommodate the emerging needs of returning migrant workers, including for COVID-19 prevention and safe migration information.

1.3 Research objectives

Six key themes were identified as part of the larger PROMISE initiative, a regional programme led by IOM. This programme seeks to define a clear pathway to promote better employment opportunities and working conditions for migrants, especially women from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, through safe migration and skills development in partnership with the private sector, training institutions, civil society and governments. This research will use the six key themes as a

framework to understand the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on returnee migrant workers to Lao People's Democratic Republic. These themes are:

1. Debt and remittances
2. Employment and employee protection
3. Access to information, social protection and services
4. Return and reintegration
5. Re-migration and re-employment including ethical recruitment
6. Skills development and retraining

This research aimed to address gaps in the existing body of research to provide meaningful answers to research questions that had not previously been addressed. To achieve this a desktop research assessment was conducted prior to the primary data collection phase (quantitative migrant survey, qualitative focus group discussions and interviews). The output of this assessment was a gap analysis that helped to shape research questions that focused on the six key themes that form the basis of this socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 assessment. The gap analysis was reviewed and approved by IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic prior to the completion of the survey development. The full analysis can be seen in **Annex x**. Findings from the study will provide evidence and recommendations to the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and other relevant stakeholders to assist in shaping policies and programmes for both rapid recover and long-term resilience of economies, which take into account the specific contributions of and challenges for migrant workers and key sectors that employ migrants.

2 METHODOLOGY

This assessment was conducted utilising a mixed method approach. This was conducted in three stages:

Stage one – desk-based research

This included analysis of recent reports and surveys focused on key socio-economic issues impacting migrants returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stage two – quantitative and qualitative interviews and surveys

Quantitative research focused on interviews with returning migrants at QCs in three provinces. Convenience sampling was deployed for these interviews. This was necessary due to the difficulty in pre-selecting migrants for interview prior to their arrival at QCs.

Qualitative analysis included the development of structured focus group surveys for FGDs planned with returning migrants and CSOs. Semi-structured (to allow the flow of key informant interviews) Interview guides were prepared for interviews with employers.

Stage three – data analysis techniques

Qualitative interviews and FGD results were coded, with the key findings isolated and unified results obtained from the different sets of interviewees and FGD participants.

The comprehensive quantitative dataset was broken down into seven sections – demographic profile, and each individual key theme. This ensured a clear focus on each of the six themes.

2.1 Desk-based research

- Between July 1 and 7, a gap analysis was conducted of the following recent socioeconomic reports and surveys:
 - Socio-Economic Impacts On Returnee Migrant Workers In Lao PDR (*IOM – 2021*)
 - Socioeconomic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Lao PDR (*IOM – 2021*)
 - Covid-19 Impact Assessment: Socio-Economic Impacts on Returnee Migrant Workers in Lao PDR (*Oxfam - 2021*)
 - Lao People's Democratic Republic Returning Migrants Survey (*IOM - 2020*)
 - Assessing Potential Changes in Lao People's Democratic Republic Migration Trends and Patterns (*IOM - 2021*)
 - Atikha: Report on Research on Savings, Investing and Entrepreneurial Behaviors of Migrant Returnees and Families in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar – Part I (2021)
 - JICA: Study on Repatriation and Social Reintegration Assistance: Lao People's Democratic Republic Victims of Trafficking Returned from Thailand (2019)
 - (further research papers to be added below)

2.2 Quantitative research

Following the submission of the quantitative survey on July 7 and subsequent review by IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic, quantitative research commenced on July 22 and was completed by August 4. 409 interviews were conducted by 13 trained enumerators. Of these 409 interviewees, there were 228 men, 180 women and 1 other (non binary) person. All interviewees were confirmed to have had no contact with a COVID-19 positive case and thus in the first two weeks of their quarantine stay (as recommended by Lao health staff who conduct PCR COVID-19 testing at QCs). The original minimum sample that had been projected was for 600 respondents. Enumerator training was conducted in person and via Zoom on 19 and 20 July.

Due to an increase in COVID-19 positive cases in late July at Lao People's Democratic Republic QCs, all interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviews were initially scheduled to take place in person. Only 22 interviews were able to be performed in person – all of which were conducted at QC KM27, Vientiane Capital. The remaining interviews were conducted in telephone in the following locations:

- QC Champasack – 39 telephone interviews
- QC Savannakhet – 348 telephone interviews

The interviews were originally intended to be uploaded directly into KoBo by the enumerators. Due to unforeseen delays in uploading the Lao version of the survey into the system, all interviews were completed on paper. These were then eventually uploaded from August 18, with the final dataset available for review from August 25. Due to the delay in uploading results into KoBo, it was not possible to assess for any quantitative analysis to inform the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions.

2.3 Qualitative research

There are two methods of qualitative analysis that were used in this study. One-on-one Interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted by telephone and online via Microsoft Teams and Zoom. They were recorded in Microsoft Word by the interviewers and/or FGD host. These were scheduled to take place between July 26-30. Due to interview scheduling, and the deteriorating COVID-19 situation impeding any physical FGDs, the research continued through to August 12.

The research was conducted as follows:

- a. 5 x Employer key informant interviews (KII) were held via phone/Zoom/Teams calls with employers in Vientiane Capital. Two were conducted in English, and three in Lao.
- b. 4 x Returning Migrant interviews. These were originally intended to be conducted as a group FGD but this was not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- c. 1 x Civil Society Organisation (CSO) focus group discussion (VFI International, Sengsavang, ASEAN-ACT and Asia Foundation) and two key informant interviews – with ILO and WHO respectively

2.4 Limitations

6 key limitations were experienced throughout the course of this study.

1. Convenience sampling - Understanding migrant experience through those who have undergone QC stays for two or more weeks, may have limited results to the least vulnerable migrants who returned through formal channels and disregarded those who returned by informal methods. There is speculation that there are a significant number of migrants that return to Lao People's Democratic Republic since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 via informal means because they are not able to afford to quarantine, don't have the required social supports nearby and/or originally migrated informally and fear being 'caught'.
 - a. The condensed time frame limited the ability for further stratification of random sampling methods within the quarantine group.
2. Limited ability to conduct in-person interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). At the outset of

the data collection phase, it was expected that all quantitative interviews would be conducted in person at QCs by the enumerators. Qualitative FGDs were expected to be conducted in person with returning migrants, and civil society organizations (CSOs) and international donor organizations. Aside from 22 quantitative migrant interviews, all other planned in-person research had to be shifted to telephone or video interview (Zoom or Microsoft Teams). This was due to a deteriorating COVID-19 delta strain situation at border crossings and QCs.

As a consequence of the increase in positive COVID-19 cases at QCs, the proposed interview sample was reduced from 800 interviewees across three provinces. With further limited time due to deteriorating situation, this was reduced to 600 interviewees when the TOR for this study was set (200 for each province, with a gender mix of 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women). Due to further time and physical constraints, the final sample was 409 returning migrants.

3. Limited scope - Some of the areas of interest including return and reintegration were difficult to make conclusions on using the perspectives of migrant worker that have just completed quarantine, and not yet fully returned to their communities. A follow-up survey would be required to give deeper understanding of challenges for returned migrants regarding re-integration.
4. Compact time frame – The initial short timeframe required small, overlapping windows for data collection, restricting sample size and method. It also created difficulty if problems were encountered in any of the steps. These included scheduling:
 - a. Availability of CSOs for FGDs in limited timeframe
 - b. Availability of employers for Key informant interviews (KII)

The compact time frame issues were exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic implications and additional difficulties in creating the quantitative survey in KoBo. This impacted subsequent delivery of quantitative results to IOM and DMA Global. These delays have shifted the project timeline into September, with an expected conclusion now of September 29, rather than August 31, 2021.

Further limitations were identified in the initial limitations set out in the provisional methodology. IOM feedback has been provided on time to date in the project.

5. IOM feedback provided on time wherever required. Any delay may result in delay to overall timeline
6. Enumerator training - we needed to be sure that all could join remotely and at the given time – this was arranged by IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic and took place at the IOM office in Vientiane Capital. While there were concerns prior to the training taking place, all available enumerators were able to attend either in person, or via Zoom.

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

3.1 Age and gender

3 In total, 409 returnee migrants took place in the quantitative survey as part of this study. The following demographics can be seen to be influenced by the location in which the survey took place, that is within the QCs in Savannakhet, Champasack and Vientiane Capital. While the research sought to balance respondents by gender, it did not achieve an accurate representation. 56 per cent of the respondents were male, 44 per cent female and less than one per cent identifying as non-binary. The lack of non-binary respondents produced a sample size too small to make indicative findings, hence for the remainder of the report, gendered analysis only considers male and female responses. For more in-depth results that consider the specific impacts of COVID-19 on migrant workers with diverse SOGIESC see IOM PROMISE SER report (REFERENCE). The majority of respondents were aged between 20-29 (63 per cent) and 30-39 (25 per cent). Three returnee migrants were under 18 years old, representing close to one per cent of the total sample. The remaining respondents were between 18 and 19 (five per cent), 40 and 49 (six per cent) and greater than 50 (less than one per cent).

Table 1

Gender	Male			Female		Other (non-binary)	
	228			180		1	
Age	0-17	18-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	
	3	19	259	102	23	3	
Ethnic Group	Lao Loum	Phouthay	Khmou	Hmong	Tai	Makong	
	375	15	16	1	1	1	
Province	Savannakhet	Salavan	Champasack	Khammouan	Bolikhamxai	Vientiane Capital	
	278	24	30	11	11	23	
	Vientiane Province		Louangphabang	Xayaboury	Attapeu		Oudomxai
	5		14	8	1		4
Time working abroad	Between 1 to 3 months	Between 4 to 6 months	Between 7 to 12 months	More than a year	1 – 2 years	3 – 4 years	5 – 10 years
	2	22	18	5	174	111	76
Primary sector of employment	Construction	Hospitality	Manufacturing and factory work	Domestic work	Wholesale and retail trade	Agriculture/forestry	Other *
	36	113	104	12	71	21	51

3.2 Province of origin, ethnic group and country of destination

Of the sample, the average respondent was from the Savannakhet province, identified as Lao Loum and migrated to Thailand to find work. Each of these three demographics had a heavy leaning towards a single answer meaning that the findings are most accurate for such a migrant worker. 68 per cent of the returnee

migrants migrated from Savannakhet while the remaining migrants migrated from a diverse set of provinces (see figure XX). In addition, 92 per cent of respondents identified as belonging to the Lao Loum ethnic group. A minority of respondents appearing from Phouthay (four per cent) and Khmou (four per cent) ethnic groups (see figure XX for remaining respondents). Moreover, 99 per cent of respondents were returning from Thailand and 98 per cent had been working primarily in Thailand. The only other CoD from this sample was Malaysia and they accounted for those who did not work or return from Thailand.

3.3 Marital and family status

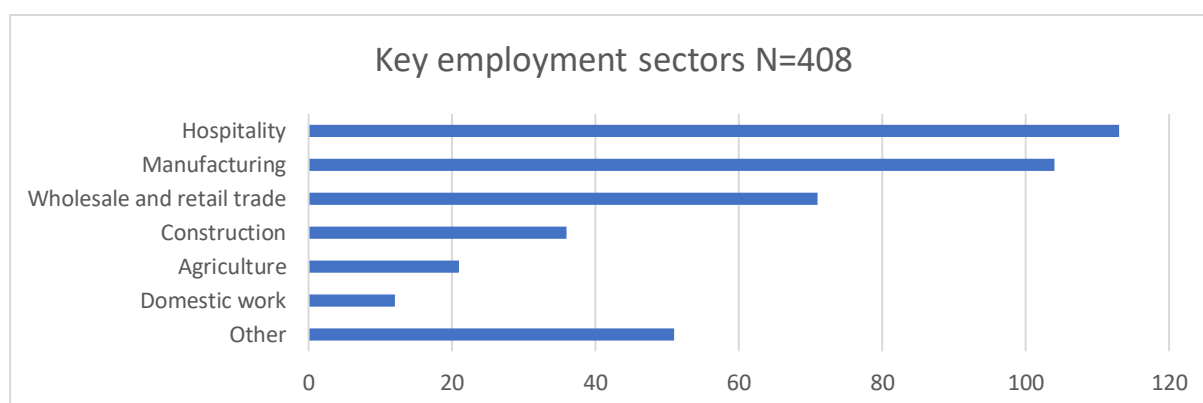
Of the total 409 sample surveyed, 56 per cent were married, followed by 37 per cent who were single, the remaining seven per cent identified as divorced, engaged or in a defacto relationship. Both male and female respondents had similar proportions of marital and family status. 47 per cent responded that they had children and of these, 80% said that their children were in their village in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

3.4 Employment and income

The employment sector of returnee migrants was recorded as 17 unique sectors, these can be seen in appendix XX. For the purpose of rigorous analysis in key sectors these 16 unique sectors were distilled into 6 key sectors and an "other" sector. 88 per cent of reported employment fit into one of these 6 sectors. Manufacturing (25 per cent) and hospitality (28 per cent) were the most common sectors of employment. These were followed by wholesale and retail trade (17 per cent) and construction (9 per cent). Agriculture and domestic work, (representing 5 per cent and 3 per cent of respondents respectively) did not constitute a large enough sample size to draw accurate findings (see figure XX). They have been included not to represent the larger community of migrant workers in these sectors but to serve as an initial indication into key areas of interest. Domestic work is a key promise sector and agriculture represents a key area of interest for the economic recovery of Lao People's Democratic Republic since many returnee migrants have begun working in this sector.

97 per cent of migrants reported earning between 5,000-20,000 THB per month on average. An error in the questionnaire format meant that few people indicated earning between 10,000 and 15,000THB, they indicated either 5-10,000 or 15-20,000 THB (see appendix XX). While this means that there was an inaccurate distribution of these incomes it allowed for cross tabulation and analysis based on high or low income. References throughout the report to "high income" returnee migrants refers to those that identified as 15,000 THB or greater, and low income to 10,000 THB or lower.

Figure 3-1 Key employment sectors



3.5 Migration documentation and timeframe

The vast majority of returnee migrants (89 per cent) reported that they used an international passport to migrate to their CoD and a small number entering without any document (10 per cent). It is clear that many of these returnee migrants intended on staying long term (for a few years or more, see section Return and reintegration) in their CoD if not for the COVID-19 and that many had already been there for a significant period of time. 88 per cent had been living in their Cod for at least a year before returning (see figure XX for more comprehensive breakdown).

FINDINGS – SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON MIGRANT WORKERS

4.1 Debt and remittances

4.1.1 Summary and Key findings

4 **KEY FINDING 1.1 A third of returnee migrants (33 per cent) borrowed money to fund their initial migration. Many of these (41 per cent) took longer than three months to pay off their debt.**

Funding the initial costs of migration can be a challenge for many migrant workers considering that many migrants leave Lao People's Democratic Republic because of a lack of employment opportunities and/or in search of employment and higher paying jobs (REFERENCE). Costs for initial migration can include expenses for; travel documents, work permits, transportation, food and accommodation (REFERENCE). For the majority of returnee migrants (58 per cent) these costs range from 5,000 to 10,000 THB (approximately USD150 and USD300). The gap analysis indicated that going into debt to cover costs such as these could be extremely detrimental if migrants fall victim to high interest money lenders or deceptive schemes (REFERENCE). These findings indicate that two-thirds (67 per cent) are able to front these themselves using their savings, and of the remaining one-third (33 per cent) who borrowed at least some money; primarily borrowed from friends or family (86 per cent) and a small proportion from other sources such as brokers, money lending services and recruitment agencies (14 per cent). While this demonstrates that migrants are less vulnerable to money lending services, it should not be overlooked. 40 per cent of migrants took longer than three months to repay their initial migration debts. These intra- or inter-family debts could create tension and have flow on effects for Lao People's Democratic Republic communities who are made vulnerable by lending money to those who are migrating.

KEY FINDING 1.2 15 per cent of migrants returned to Lao People's Democratic Republic with outstanding debt. Women migrants were twice as likely to have outstanding debt and had 50 per cent higher levels of concern about being able to repay.

While nearly all migrants reported being able to repay the debts associated with their initial migration, findings are more concerning relating to debt being taken out before their return journey. 15 per cent of migrants reported having some outstanding debt on their return to Lao, with the majority of these being for the purpose of taking more money home. Few explicitly borrowed money for their return journey. This area of debt affects male and female migrants differently, females taking out more debt for the reason of bringing more home and reporting higher levels of concern about being able to repay this debt in the future. 45 per cent of women who had outstanding debt reported that they are "very concerned" that they will not be able to repay this debt.

KEY FINDING 1.3 Nearly all migrants engaged with personal saving and remittance sending (92 per cent and 94 per cent, respectively).

Remittance sending emerged as an almost universal migrant worker experience. Very few people reported any problems in this area except concern that the remittances they sent weren't enough for their families' needs.

The vast majority of migrants report having money remaining after covering their living costs and it appears that nearly all, at some point, engage with personal saving (92 per cent) and with remittance sending (94 per cent). Access to and understanding of financial services is relevant and necessary for the vast majority of migrant workers. From these findings it appears that returnee migrants did not have a broad understanding of available remittance sending receiving options for them and their families. A significant number (34 per cent) still used informal methods of sending such as via employers, friends or family to deliver money across borders. The findings also suggest that the families of the Lao migrant workers have very limited access to banking services, since the majority (81 per cent) can only receive via cash/agent services and only a small proportion (18 per cent) reported that they could receive from a bank branch. While many use informal methods, the majority of respondents used bank transfers to transfer money to private money transfer services or agents who provide cash/pick up services to their families. This indicates a lack of understanding of available financial services which could streamline the process; newer money transfer services that typically provide lower fees, higher exchange rates and easier methods of receiving (such as mobile wallets).

KEY FINDING 1.4 Most remittances were sent on a regular basis and in amounts of 3,000 to 10,000 THB. Remittance receiving families spent this income largely on immediate needs.

Migrants sent small amounts on a regular basis, most either once a month (48 per cent) or moderate amounts once every few months (40 per cent), with few sending irregularly or "only when needed" (two per cent). The average amounts sent per month were largely (77 per cent) between 3,000 and 10,000 THB (approximately USD100 and USD300). Findings indicated that remittances are of great significance to the remittance receiving families. Most being spent on key areas of immediate need such as bills, food and non-food essentials (between 60 and 80 per cent). With less being spent on education or home improvements (between 20 and 30 per cent) and very little on luxury goods (eight per cent). This aligns with the findings that migrants were concerned about remittance not being enough for their families. It reveals vulnerability for families who previously relied on remittances and will no longer be receiving them once their migrant family members return home.

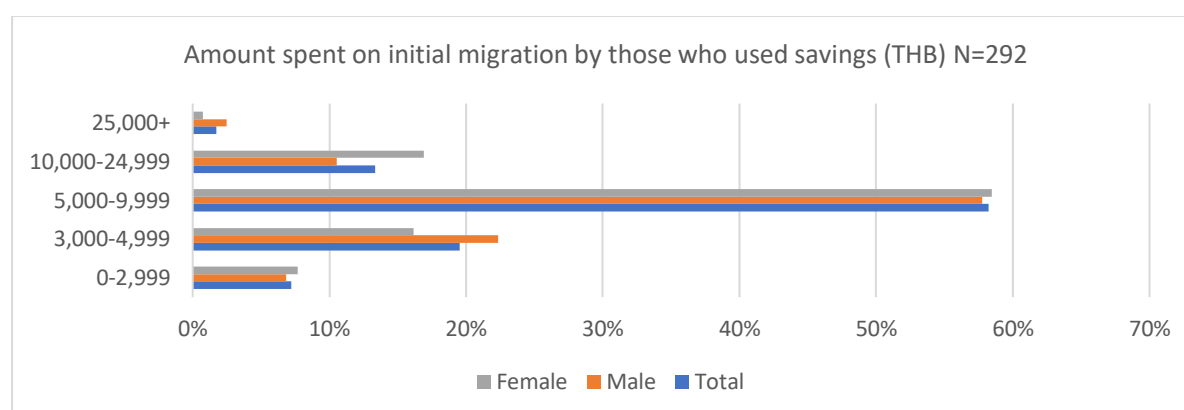
4.1.2 Initial migration cost and debt

The majority of migrants use their savings to fund their initial migration and nearly a third borrow at least

part of the funds required to migrate. 67 per cent of migrants use their savings to cover these expenses such as travel documents, transportation, food and lodging during travel. 25 per cent borrow to cover these costs, and a further seven per cent combine savings and borrowing to pay the fund the amount required. A small minority of migrants describe that there was no cost involved (1 per cent).

Initial migration costs between 5,000 and 10,000 THB (approximately USD150 and USD300) for the majority of migrants but some report initial migration ranging from no cost to 25,000 THB (USD750). The most commonly report cost range for migrants who used their savings was between 5,000 and 10,000 THB (58 per cent), followed by 3,000-5,000 THB (20 per cent), and then 10,000-25,000 THB (13 per cent).

Figure 4-1 Initial migration spending by gender



Of the 129 migrants who reported borrowing at least some of the funds required to cover expenses relating to initial migration, the compelling majority (86 per cent) borrowed from friends and family. From our sample, women migrants are up to 15% more likely to borrow from friends and family compared to their male counterparts (95 per cent and 79 per cent respectively). Only six per cent of the 57 women respondents reported using money lending or broker services compared to 21 per cent of men.

Over half (57 per cent) of the returning migrants paid off their debt within three months of taking out the loan and only 12 per cent taking more than one year to return what they had borrowed or loaned. The remaining migrants (29 per cent) paid off their debt between three and six months while some migrants (six per cent), returned this amount within the first month a. Migrants who were identified as higher income earners were three times more likely to repay their debts within the first month than those identified as being low income. Yet this difference dissipates over time, with marginal difference in repayment times up to three and six months. More high-income migrants reporting taking longer than two years to repay their debts.

4.1.3 Savings

A large majority (89 per cent) of migrants reported having disposable income. Of the remaining ten per cent, some (eight per cent) reported sometimes having money remaining after covering living expenses and very few (two per cent) reported that they did not.

60 per cent of migrants reported that they primarily sent this left-over money home and 39% reported

saving this money for personal use. These rates were comparable between male and female migrants and between low- and high-income earners.

92 per cent of respondents reported putting some savings away each month. While many migrants report saving, the amount saved remains below 4,000 THB per month for the majority. In context, this would require at least two months to save the amount required to cover initial migration costs. 62 per cent of respondents saved less than 4,000THB (USD 125) a month on average while 25 per cent saved between 4,000 and 8,000 THB and eight per cent reporting that they did not save at all. It remains difficult to conclude based on these questions, what proportion of income went to living expenses, savings and remittances but it appears as though most migrants, after covering living expenses, participated in both saving and remittance sending.

4.1.4 Remittances

Nearly all (94 per cent) respondents reported sending remittances. Only six per cent reporting that they did not send money home to friends or family. There were no considerable differences between genders or income levels. It is clear that sending remittances is a key feature of the migrant worker experience.

Migrants primarily sent remittances regularly, 48 per cent sending once a month and 40 per cent once every few months. A further three per cent sent weekly or fortnightly and only eight per cent reported that they sent remittances 'only when needed'. The remaining two per cent sent "once off".

Of those who sent remittances, a large proportion (41 per cent) sent between 3,000 and 5,000 THB. The next most common amount sent ranges from 5,000-10,000 which 36 per cent reported to send, followed by 0-3,000THB sent by 13 per cent. A small number (nine per cent), primarily consisting of high-income earners sent higher than 10,000THB a month on average.

These remittance senders used bank transfers as the most common method of sending (47 per cent) followed by employers (23 per cent). Money transfers sent via money transfer operator only represented 16 per cent of the total reported most frequent ways to send. Lastly, 11 per cent of people used friends or family to carry the money home. In the context of the receiving methods question it seems many people used bank transfers to transfer funds to another form of operator or agent who distributed cash to their families.

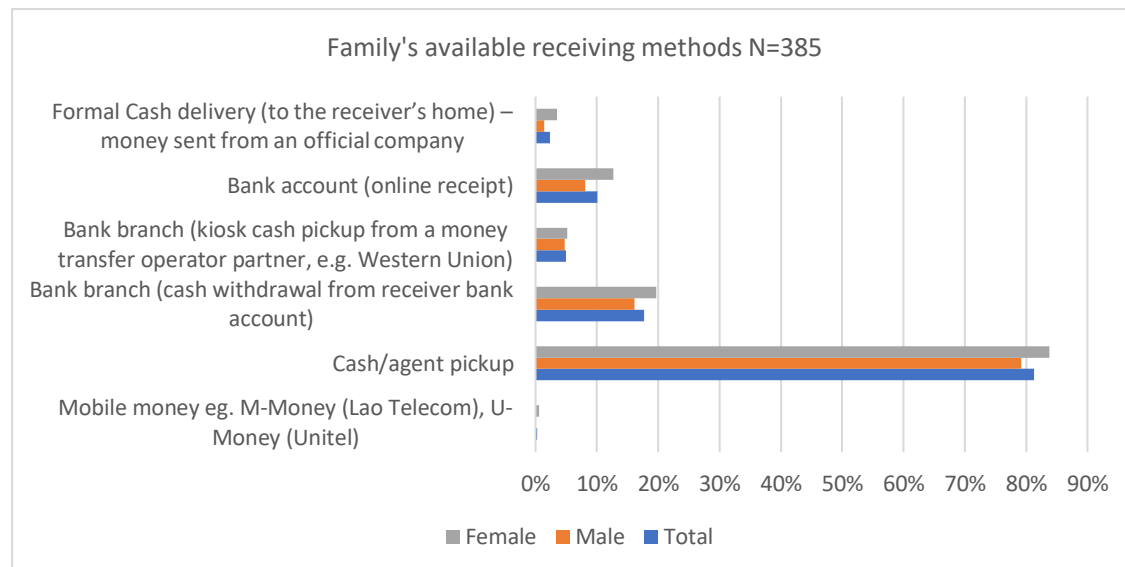
Virtually no issues were reported with any of these sending methods. 99 per cent of people reporting no issues, while only one per cent suggesting they were too costly.

Remittance sending methods remain largely unaffected by covid (since March 2020). 95 per cent of respondents reporting that they did not change their method of sending since March 2020.

When asked about potential methods their families could receive money, the vast majority of respondents only listed cash/agent services. The largest response (81 per cent) stated their family could receive via cash/agent services, far less responded that they were able to withdraw cash from a bank account (18 per cent), and even less acknowledging the possibility of receiving via a bank account online. Recognition of mobile wallet opportunities were virtually absent, only one respondent acknowledging this method. These

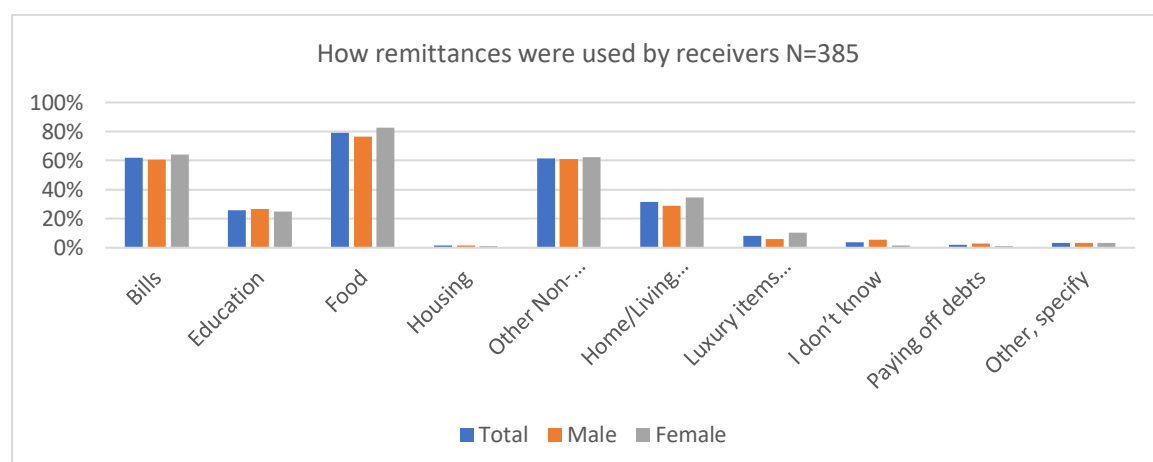
results are inconsistent with the results regarding the methods of sending above. It implies that migrants misunderstood this question either interpreting it as “the easiest way for your family to receive money” or misunderstandings stemming from a lack of knowledge of available remittance services and their methods.

Figure 4-2 Receive methods by gender



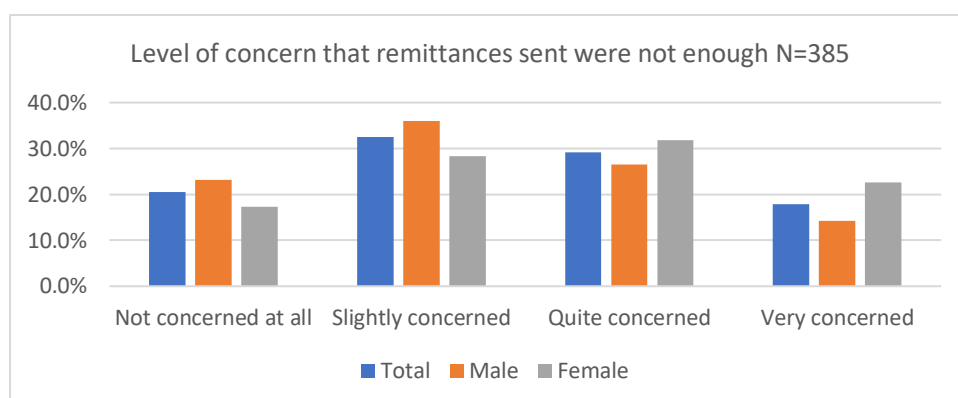
Returning migrants reported that their recipients spent the money in three key areas; food (79 per cent) paying for bills (62 per cent), and other non-food essentials (62 per cent). These three areas are immediate needs, and it appears that remittances primarily go to these rather than long-term investments. These investments appear with significance but at lower rates, they include education (26 per cent) and home/living expenses (32 per cent).

Figure 4-3 Remittance use by gender



Returning migrants reported diverse levels of concern that the amount they were sending home wasn't enough to support their family. The large majority reporting at least some level of concern (80 per cent). Men tended to show lower levels of concern than women, reporting higher levels of non-concern and low concern and lower levels of concern and high concern. Genders separated by at least five per cent at each level of concern.

Figure 4-4 Remittance concern by gender



4.1.5 Cost of return migration

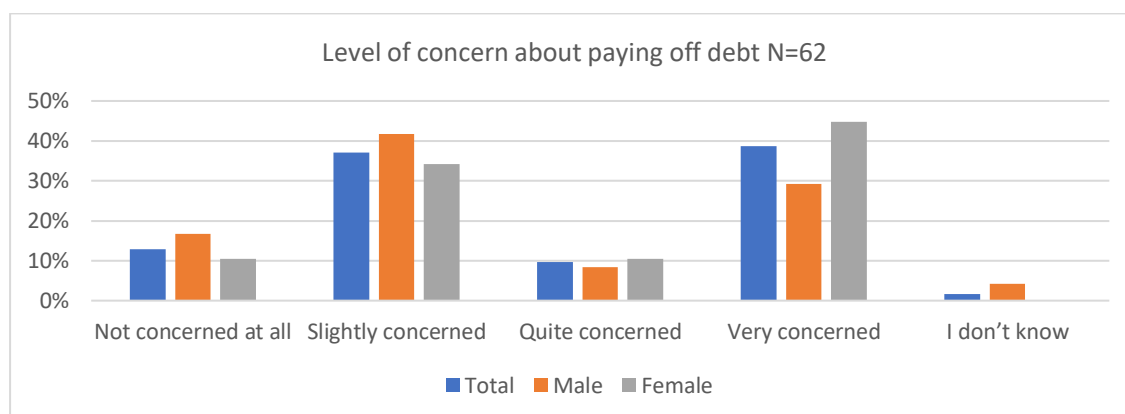
Nearly all returning migrants used their savings to fund their return migration (92 per cent). Five per cent used a mixture of borrowed funds and savings. Only three per cent borrowed money to fund this journey. Of those 32 who responded that they borrowed at least some of the funds, 72 per cent from friends and family and 22 per cent from their employers. These are similar results to the methods of funding the initial migration.

4.1.6 Outstanding debt

15 per cent of returning migrants reporting having some outstanding debt. More than half of this (eight per cent) reported taking out this debt to bring more money home for their family. While the other half was roughly split between paying for food and accommodation on the return.

Similarly, there is diverse concern about the ability to repay this debt. 85 per cent express at least some level of concern about being able to repay this debt. Female respondents were both more likely to have outstanding debt – 22 per cent to 11 per cent of male respondents – and more likely to have concerns about the repayment of this debt – 45 per cent reporting high levels of concern to 29 per cent of males.

Figure 4-5 Debt concern by gender



4.1.7 Qualitative findings - Remittances

CSOs suggest that more effort needs to be placed in encouraging migrants to understand the available processes of remittance sending. This would fit neatly into a broader scope understanding of financial services available to them and their families. Initiatives that educate people about banking services, savings and remittances would holistically place people to be more resilient in emergencies and be more effective remittance senders. In terms of outreach to be able to support this understanding, technology and social has been identified as very important.

There is concern about families that are no longer receiving remittances. Some CSOs are attempting to do coordinate relief programs but these seem unclear and small scale.

4.2 Employment and employment protection

KEY FINDING 2.1 The apparent informality of the decision-making process for workers travelling abroad leads them to base their choices of working opportunities on familiarity and colloquial relationships.

Half of the Lao workers that travel abroad to work have had some domestic work experience in the industry they are travelling to work in abroad and many cite their choice of work to be made based on the ease of finding work or even an unawareness of any other jobs being available. A clear majority of workers are also likely to find their place of work overseas through family and friends' networks rather than formal recruitment channels.

KEY FINDING 2.2 Workers chose a variety of forms of documentation to travel overseas, importantly there is an awareness that the right documentation can offer them protections should anything go wrong. Around 10% of workers interviewed said they travelled with no documentation.

Costs of travel documentation varies a great deal, yet a good proportion of workers chose to take out the more expensive forms of documentation for the added protection it offers. However, in terms of knowing how to access assistance when it is needed, workers do not always seem to be clear that they would know how to – although the vast majority said they would turn to the Laos People's Democratic Republic government.

KEY FINDING 2.1 Most workers working in Thailand confirmed that they had some form of visa for their employment.

Despite the higher costs, almost 50 per cent of migrant workers are using the MoU as they understand it provides them with a certain degree of protection. However, whilst this provides some protection, most workers would not know where to seek advice when facing difficult situations, including understanding if they are covered for sick pay if they fall ill.

4.2.1 Recruitment

Overall, approximately half of returning workers surveyed had work experience in the sector they were employed in abroad. However, only a very small minority completed any vocational training prior to departure in the area they chose to work in during their placement. Employment opportunities for workers outside of Lao People's Democratic Republic were found to have a varied along a slight gender split, with a higher proportion of women attributing their employment placement to the fact there were no other jobs in their CoD. Perhaps this could be due to lack of awareness of other types of work where they could find employment. Men answering the same question suggested their employment abroad was more likely driven by ease of finding work, that there were a lot of openings in a particular sector, or that the pay was good. Overall, both men and women often chose to find work in an area they were familiar with and had experience with in Lao People's Democratic Republics, with around half of all respondents agreeing.

Figure 4-6 Choice of sector by gender

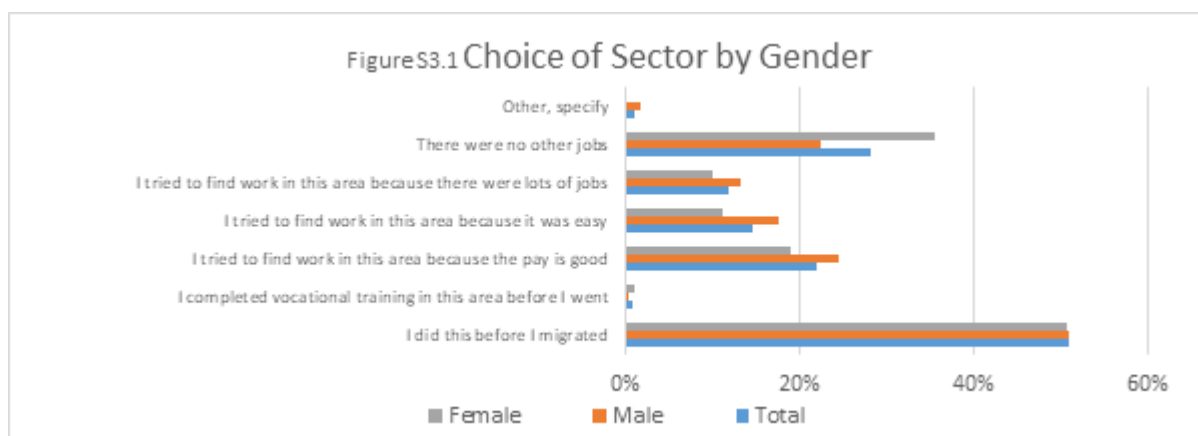
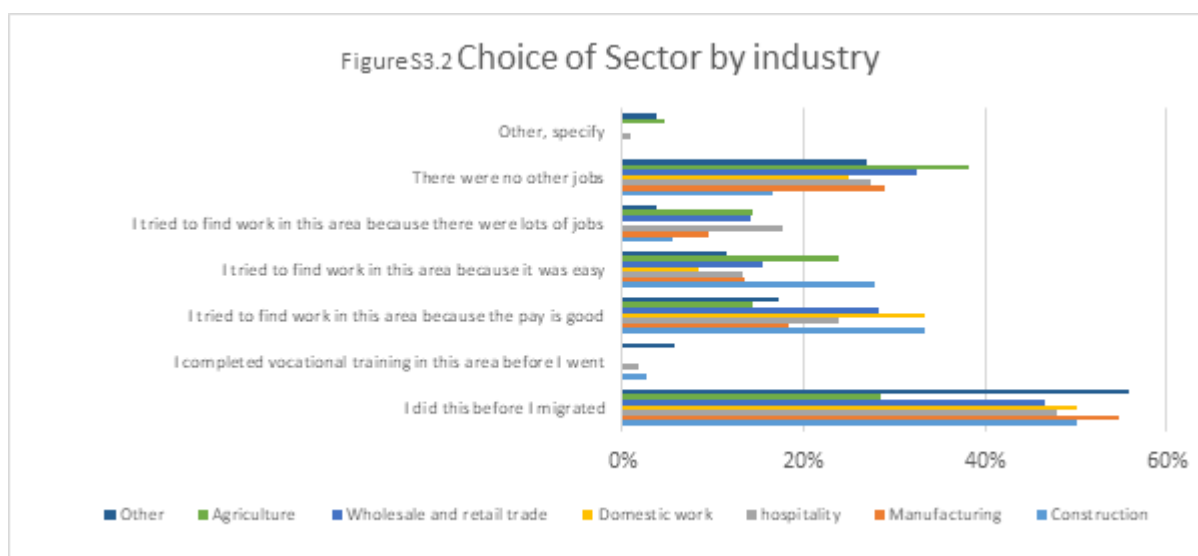
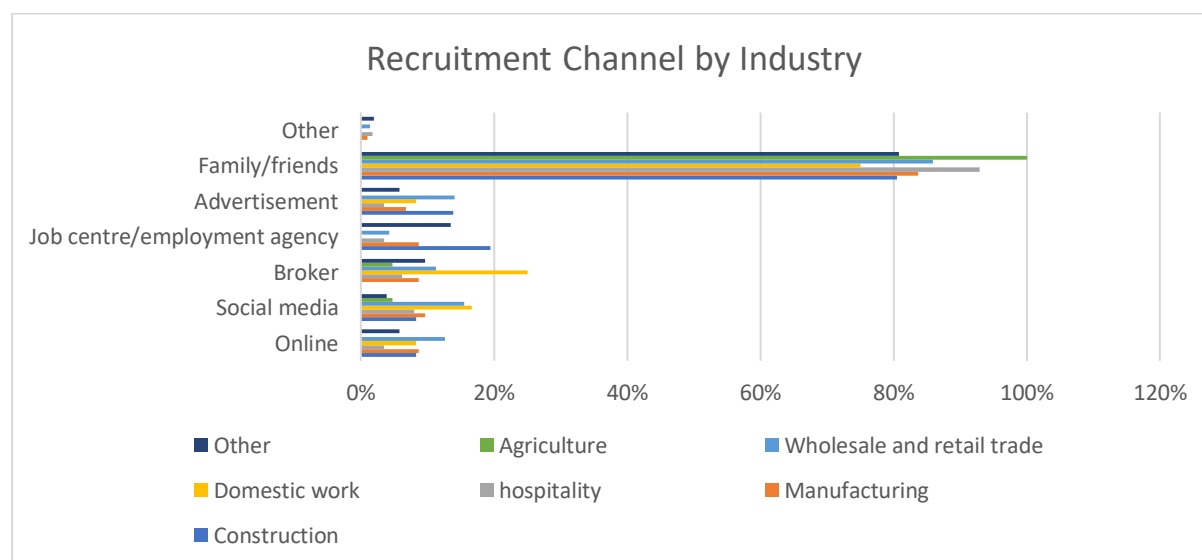


Figure 4-7 Choice of sector by industry



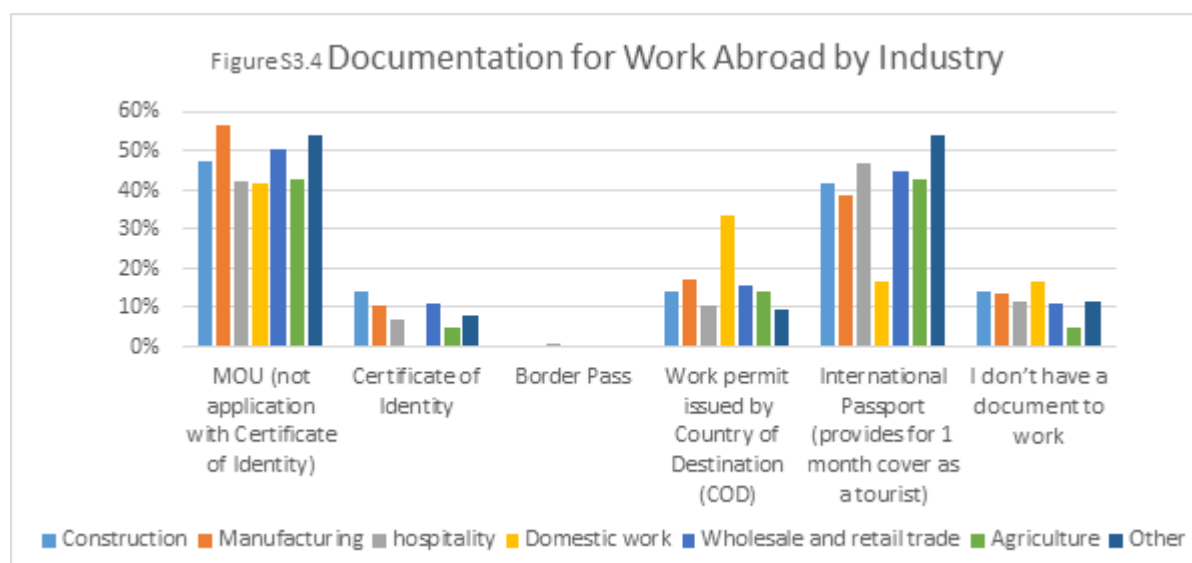
Choices of sector where workers found their employment shows some preferences based on potential earnings. Figure S3.2 shows where workers have chosen to work in sectors because the work was well paid, construction and domestic workers were among the most frequent to select this reason for their choice of work. It should also be mentioned that a high number of workers selecting employment based on experience prior to migrating also worked in these industries. This suggests there may be more or better paid opportunities in these industries for workers willing to migrate. Construction work, as well as being considered well paid, was also found to be a sector where workers could easily find work. This signifies that there may be many construction work opportunities for Lao migrant workers in CoD. A large number of opportunities were also found to be available in the hospitality sector, with a high proportion of workers in this sector also having experience prior to leaving Lao People's Democratic Republic. Employment opportunities in agriculture reflect options that were either considered easy by the worker or that there were no other jobs available.

Figure 4-8 Recruitment channel by Industry



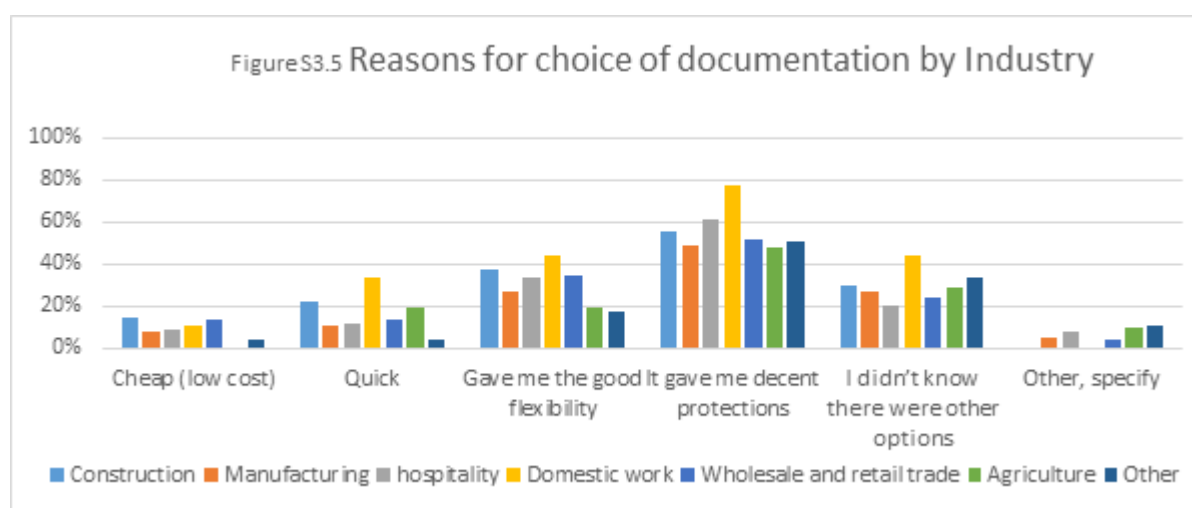
Overwhelmingly migrant workers are finding employment overseas through family and friends' networks. While there seems to be little difference on a gender basis and the channels used follow the same pattern as Figure S3.3, those working in domestic help seem to be more likely to use other channels for finding employment, with a number reporting using a broker and others also using social media channels to find work. Construction workers reported using job centres and following other advertisements to find work. Agricultural workers were least likely to use any other means of recruitment channels, relying most heavily on friends and family networks.

Figure 4-9 Documentation by industry



Although in the minority, there were returning migrant workers across all industries who reported they had not provided any documents to work overseas. This was least likely to be the case by those working in the agriculture industry (Figure S3.5) and there was no discernible difference between genders. Workers in domestic employment were most likely to be holders of a work permit issued by the host country and least likely to be using certificates of identity or passports. Workers in manufacturing were most likely to use the MOU, and hospitality workers were most likely to use their international passport. Construction workers reported mostly using an MOU and international passport.

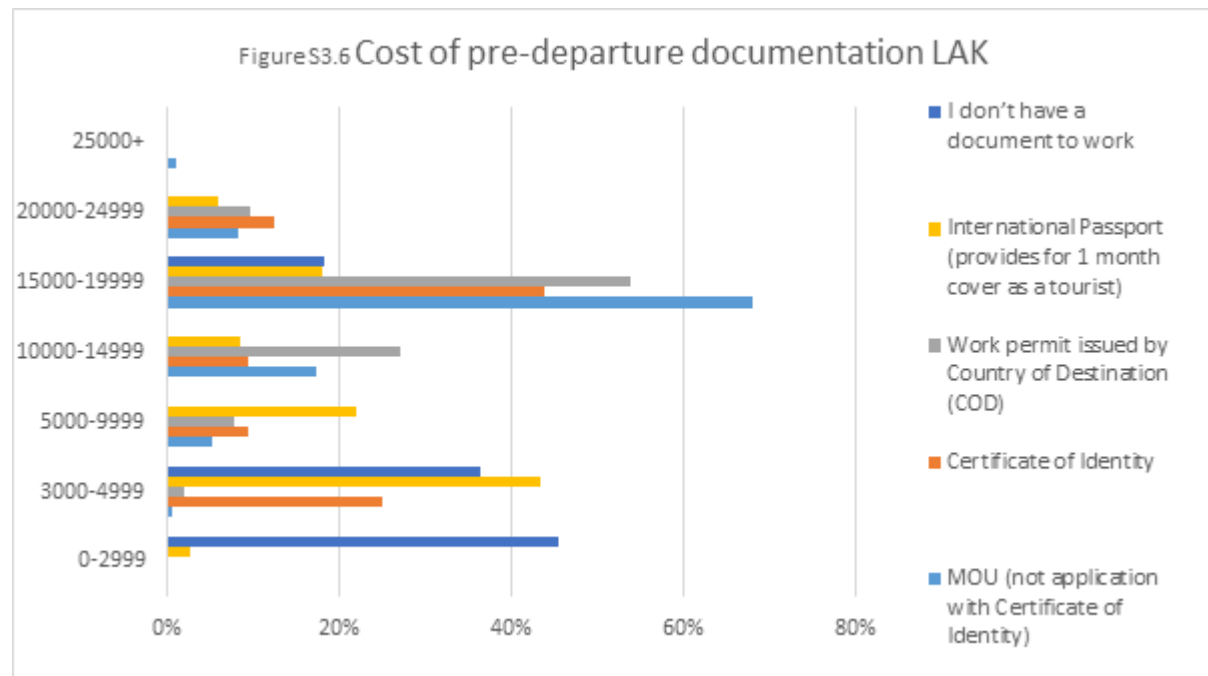
Figure 4-10 Reason for documentation by industry



Workers are making considered choices over their use of documentation and most importantly the protections the documentation offers are of top priority. Flexibility is also important and of lower importance is workers looking for work arrangements that are quick and low cost. While a proportion of

workers were not aware of alternative options being available, it is reassuring to see that workers who are aware of different options are making important choices to protect themselves and give themselves flexibility. In particular for the women employed in domestic work, nearly 80 per cent cited that the protections offered was a key reason for choosing this form of documentation.

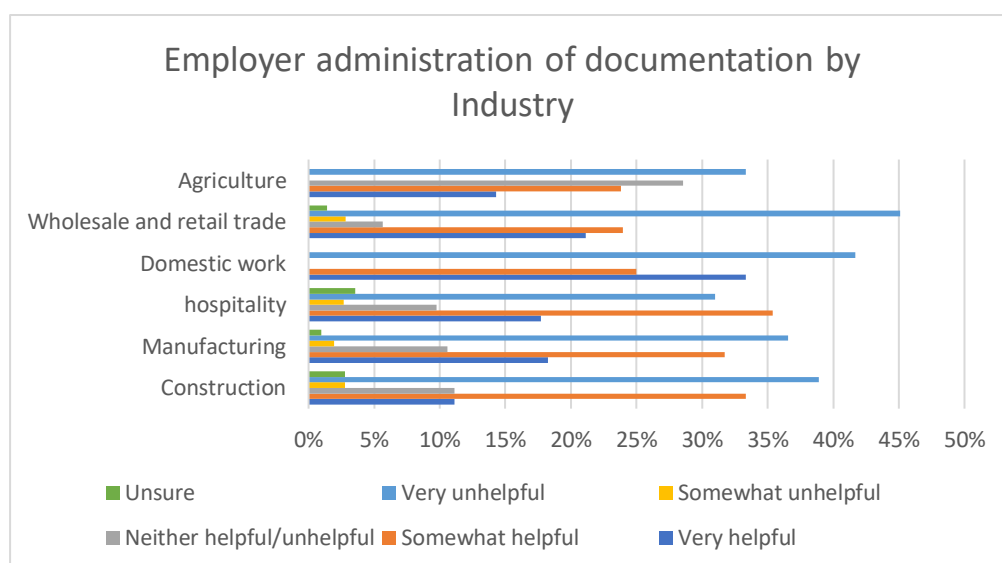
Figure 4-11 Documentation cost by documentation



Costs of pre-departure documentation for workers to travel abroad varies from LAK 3,000 up to LAK 25,000. There is quite a variation cited in the costs for obtaining various methods of documentation. For instance, obtaining a passport has costs ranging from the 0 to up to LAK 24,999 brackets. This could be because some respondents are factoring in other costs such as travel or visas.

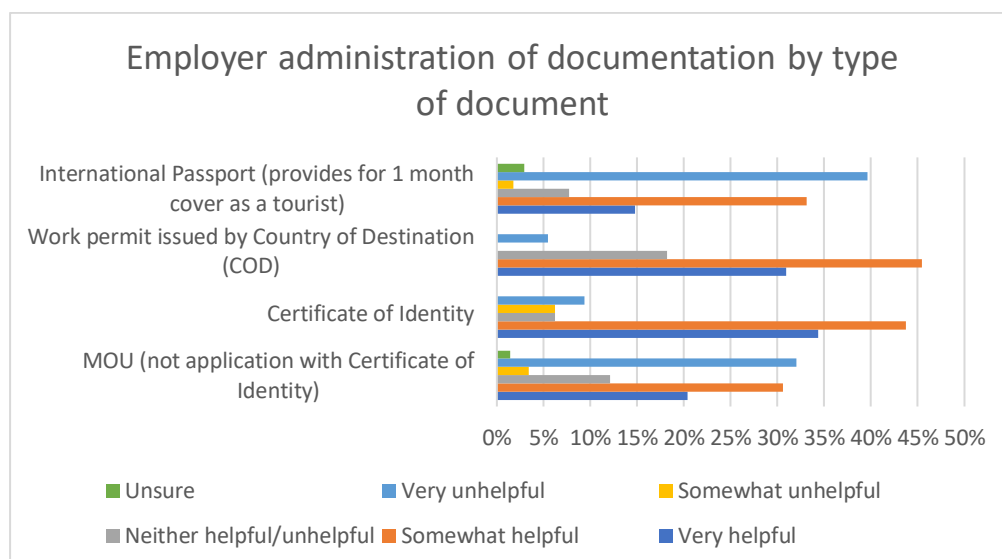
It appears that most of the lower cost forms of documentation are certificates of identity and passports, rather than permits to work, such as the MOU or COD work permits. The MOU and host country work permits are generally considerably higher priced - between LAK 15,000 and LAK 20,000. Yet these more expensive options are the workers preferred choices due to the perceived increased protection and flexibility afforded by these forms of documentation.

Figure 4-12 Employer administration support by industry



The visa application process for migrant workers to travel overseas involves the employer's cooperation in processing papers for these to be approved. Workers in the agriculture industry found their employers to be the most helpful in processing and providing them with their necessary visa documentation. Construction and domestic work employers were rated slightly lower, although the domestic workers' experience found that there were some very helpful employers balanced by some very unhelpful employers, with little in between. Regarding types of documentation being applied for, workers applying for work permits within the CoD/host country found the employers to be most helpful.

Figure 4-13 Employer administration support by documentation



4.2.2 Reporting Channels / Employee Protection

Across the board workers did not know where they could find support in abusive or exploitative situations arising in the workplace. The responses were fairly consistent across all industries and gender and figure

S3.10 shows overwhelmingly that the most common response would be to turn to Lao People's Democratic Republic authorities - including embassies, labour attachés and authorities in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Further to this, others would seek assistance from friends and family either in the host country or at home, as well the host country's government. Most of the respondents did not report experiencing any situations where they felt under threat or ill treatment from their employers. However, there were a small proportion (4%) who did experience abuse, the forms of which are detailed on Figure S3.11. For those that reported these abusive situations generally it did not change their work status, but for a few it did. Approximately ten per cent sought a different type of work permit, some only had a short time remaining on their existing permit, and in rare cases the situation terminated their work permit (because of a lack of documentation for example).

Figure 4-14 Awareness by sector

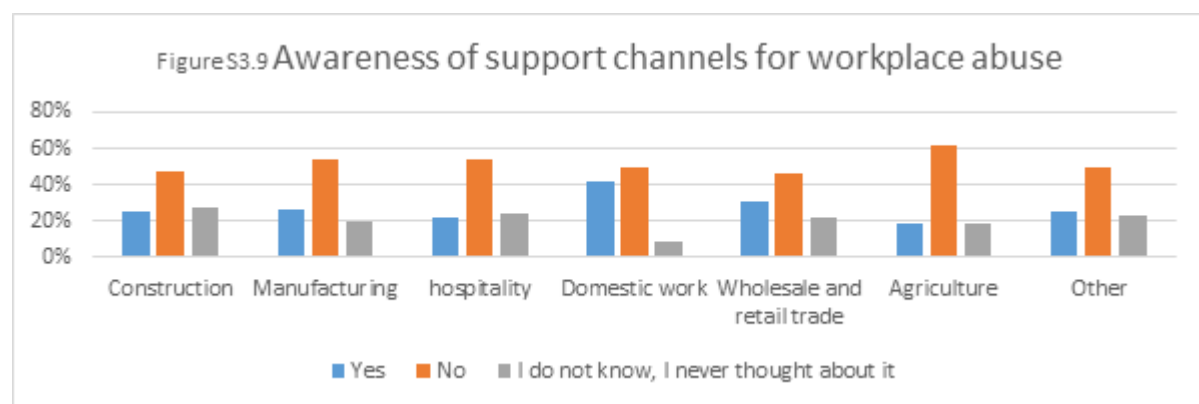


Figure 4-15 Place of assistance by gender

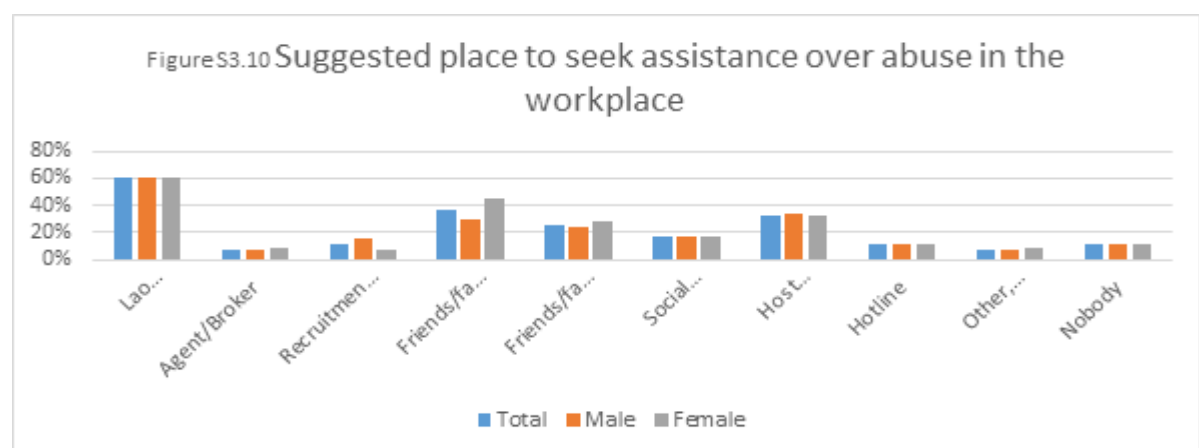
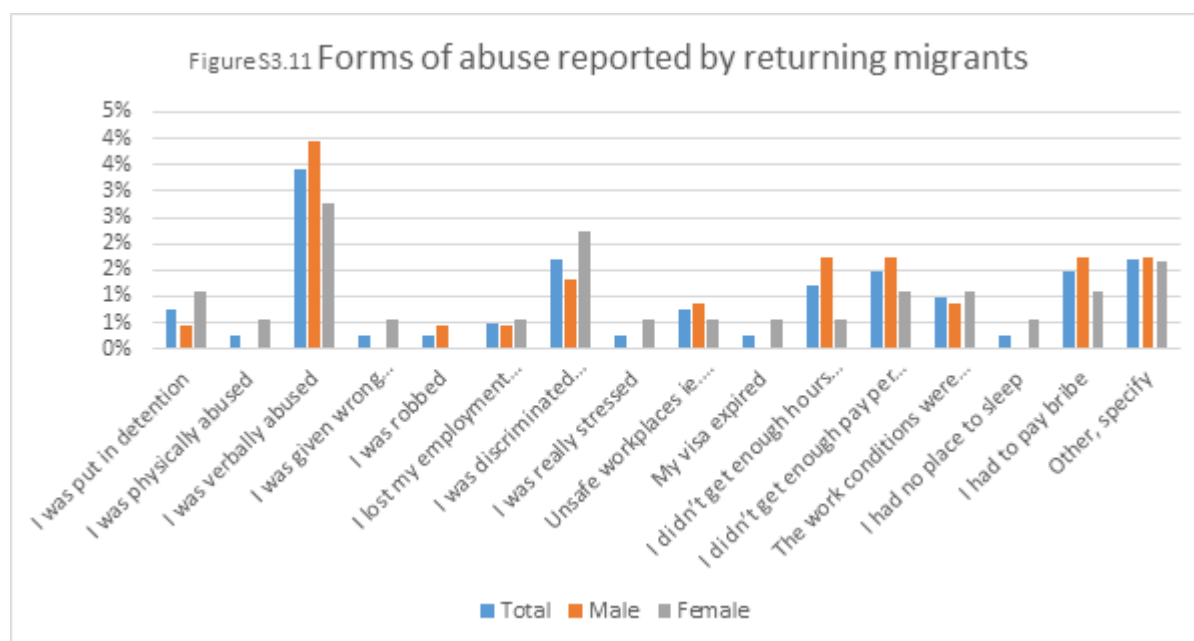


Figure 4-16 Form of abuse by gender



Among those who reported experiencing an abusive workplace situation, there was a distinct difference recorded between male and female workers with regard to seeking assistance. While numbers in the sample pool were small, men were found to be much less likely to turn to anyone for assistance. Earlier in the questionnaire, workers were asked to suggest who they may turn in an abusive situation, with many suggesting the Lao People's Democratic Republics government. However, from the small sample that found themselves needing assistance, the results show they turned to their friends and family in the host country. A minority went to their agent or recruitment firm and some others to the host country's authorities. The majority were able to resolve their problems through these support channels. None of the workers who reported experiencing abuse turned to the Lao People's Democratic Republic authorities. For those that experienced abuse in the workplace but did not seek any help, common themes were recorded for the reasons for this. Predominantly, that they do not know who to turn to or it is considered too difficult. Others also believe their migrant status excluded them from any support.

Figure 4-17 Sought assistance by gender

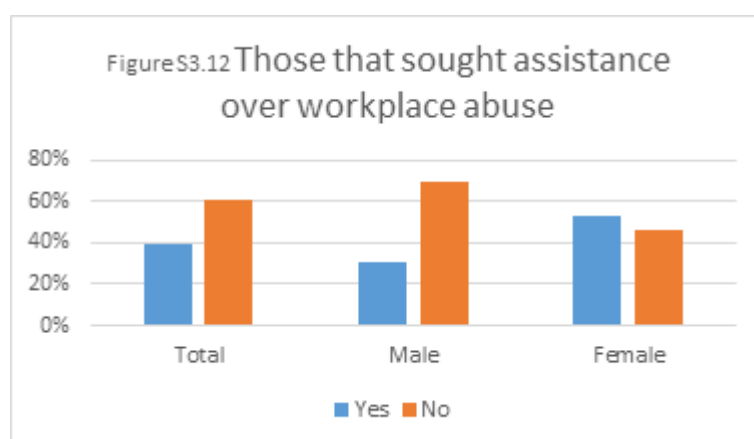


Figure 4-18 Support channels by gender

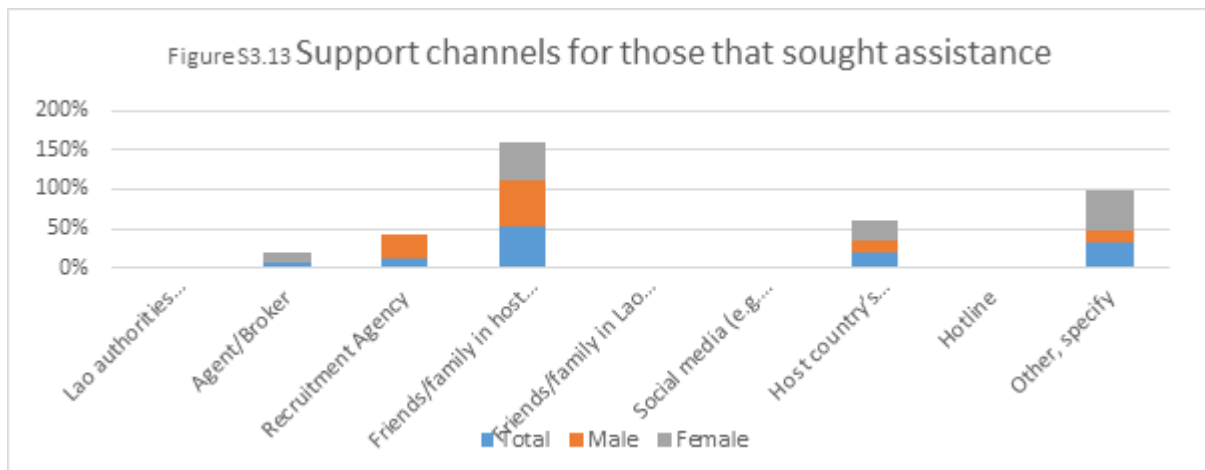
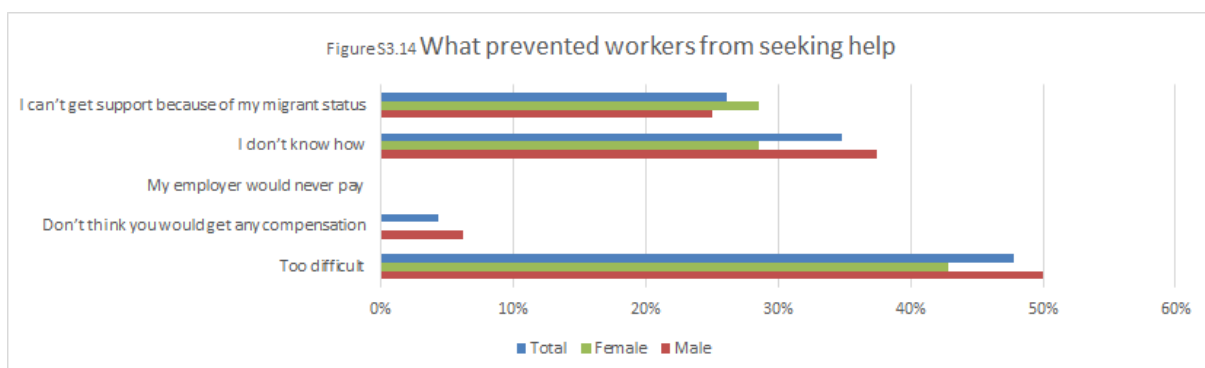


Figure 4-19 Barriers by gender



This problem is displayed again in the workers' knowledge of employee rights and their level of comprehension regarding worker protection. Only a very limited number of workers had a strong understanding of their rights and the employment protections they were entitled to, while a large proportion of the workers did not know very much about it at all. Furthermore, there was little contrast in this area between men and women. They both had a similar level of understanding.

Figure 4-20 Rights awareness by sector

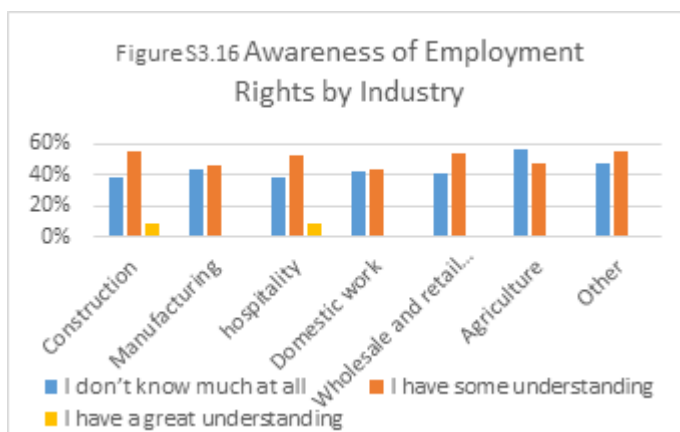
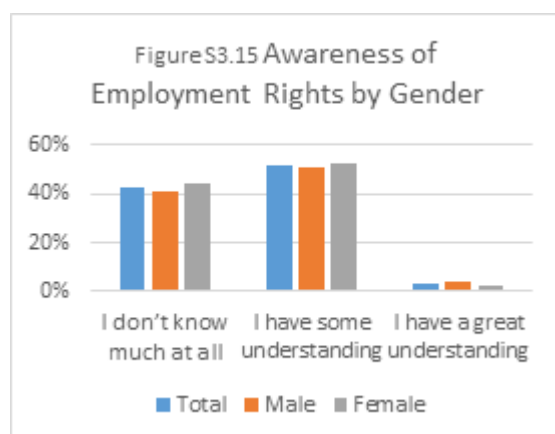
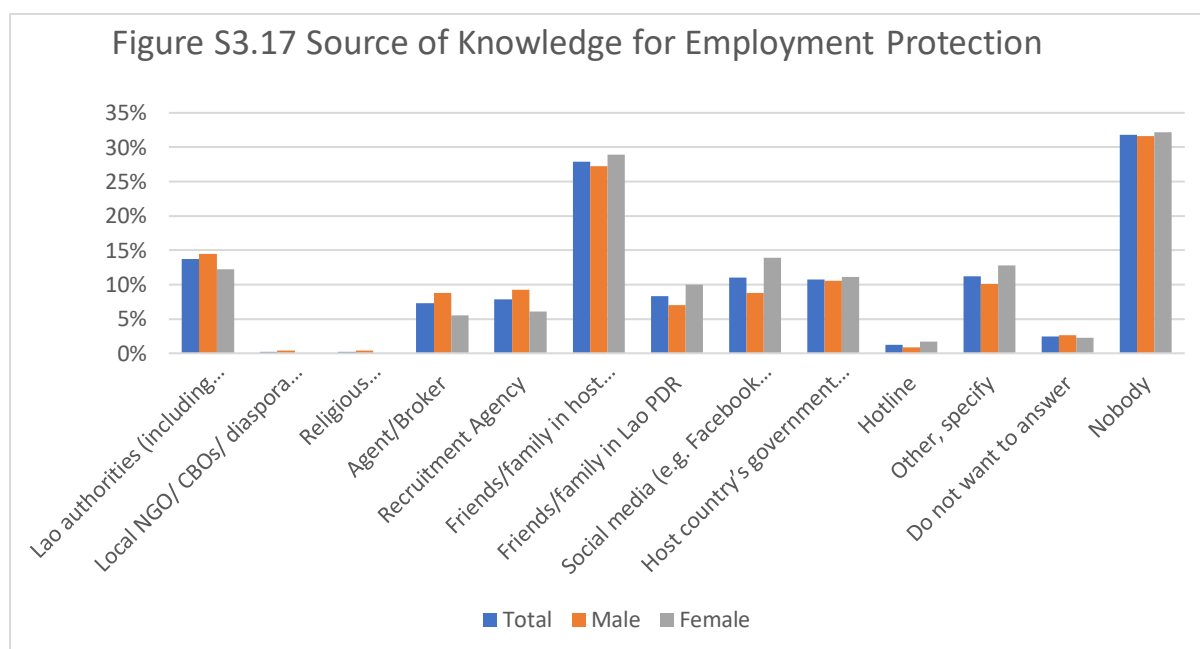


Figure 4-21 Rights awareness by gender



There is little evidence of any formal education or preparedness for the migrant workers in terms of their awareness surrounding employment protection. Many responded that nobody had provided them with any knowledge in the matter and a large number of other workers said they learned about employment protection from friends or family. Figure S3.17 shows the distribution of sources by gender, but there is little difference across the different industries, with no specific industry standing out as having more access to information than any others. It should also be noted that local and international NGOs, CSOs and local diaspora groups have not been noted by any of the workers interviewed as providing education in terms of worker protection.

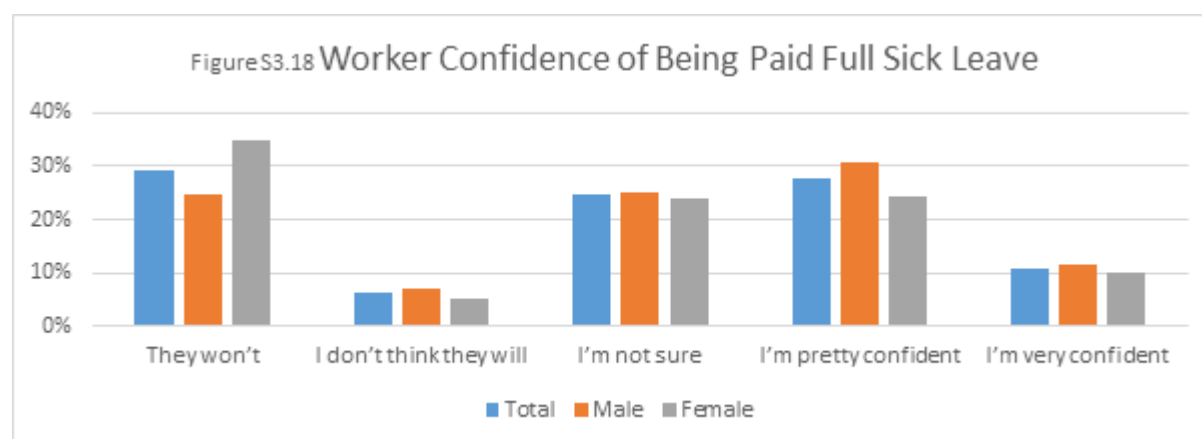
Figure 4-22 Employment Protection Knowledge Source



In the event of workers becoming unwell and unable to work, the opinion of workers who could either

confidently say they were or were not entitled sick leave was quite evenly divided, although only a minority of workers were confident, they would be entitled to full sick pay. Women were generally more pessimistic about the likelihood of receiving sick benefits. Interestingly in the strongly confident category, the results between men and women were quite even. The results from this were consistent across the industries with no one industry standing out as faring better or worse than any other.

Figure 4-23 Sick Leave Worker Confidence



4.2.3 Qualitative findings - Employment assistance programs

There are some CSOs supporting returned migrants to access employment but these do not have a large scope and are mainly in central locations. The government is responsible for this kind of support in regional areas. The CSOs identified a slight opportunity to do more but that current solutions and programs were working at a reasonable standard. Rather, they themselves struggled to access returned migrants as they had returned to their home towns. This means that they are a dispersed population that is increasingly isolated as a result of COVID-19 rules and associated travel regulations. Furthermore, assistance programs are difficult to run because employment itself is hard to find in this period of “economic downturn”.

There are greater opportunities to align workers with job vacancies by participating in a coordinated and unified response. CSOs expressed intent to work with government ministries to share information and resources that would help align the needs and skills of returning migrant workers with job vacancies in Lao People's Democratic Republic. They envision a platform that announces job vacancies, that could arise from discussion with the Lao National Chamber of Commerce (LNCCI) and Industry and the Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW).

4.2.4 Qualitative findings - Process improvement (MoU and other documentation)

The number of challenges for migrant workers getting the MoU outweigh the benefit for many. This has led to low numbers of migrants using this, and other channels of regular migration. Most CSOs agree that more people are crossing the border without documentation than with documentation.

Processing times for MoU are unnecessarily and debilitatingly long. A CSO reported that they can take between six months and one year, adding that this should not take longer than three months.

Costs make this form of documentation inaccessible. Some CSOs suggested that it can cost up to 20,000THB (USD600) to go through this process.

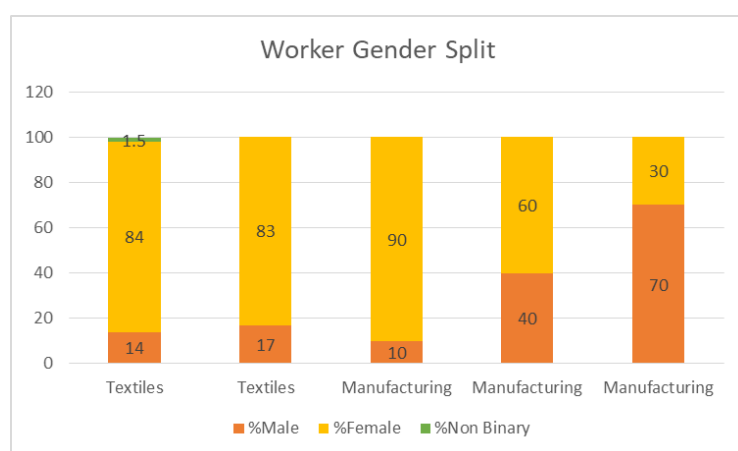
The complicated nature of the application process makes it difficult for migrant workers. It is reported to be comprised of several steps that make a long and tedious process. Steps such as mandatory pre-departure training, acquisition of a passport and then using a recruitment agency become exhaustive.

The restrictive nature of the MoU makes migration riskier and more difficult for migrants. It is understood by CSOs that migrants are not able to change employment easily while engaged in MoU migration. This is a danger for migrants who lose their employment, particularly if a business shuts down. It means they do not have very long to find new employment before they must return to Lao People's Democratic Republic. Migrants are opting to avoid the MoU for the greater flexibility that it offers.

Neither recruitment agencies or employers are held accountable for ensuring migrant worker documentation is up to date and closely followed. Migrants wishing to stay longer than the initial two-year period, must apply for extensions in close coordination with their employer. Some migrants are finding it difficult to stay on top of the different processes when neither the recruitment agency or employer is taking initiative or being active in this process.

4.2.5 Qualitative findings - Recruitment

Figure 4-24 Worker Gender Split



Most employers reported compliance with ethical recruitment and there appeared to be little or no bias in gender during the recruitment process. Across the board recruitment was based on the abilities of the candidate and suitability to the tasks of the work. All but one of the employers interviewed had a significantly higher proportion of female workers in their staffing and the only employer to suggest any bias in gender recruitment clarified some tasks were more suited to female workers, and, for example, where greater strength may be required these positions might be more suited to male workers so as not to pose a danger to health. All employers interviewed offered positions suitable for low skilled workers and returning migrants.

Recruitment channels vary among the employers, with all employers relying strongly on their current employee network for finding new workers. One work place reported operating a 'bring a friend' scheme

and rewards current workers with a bonus if their introduction results in employment. Another respondent stated that they only recruited within their worker network pool. Other channels of recruitment include advertising online on various facebook pages and announcement boards at the local markets through the local village chief. A few employers mentioned commercial advertising channels such as TV and radio as well as use of recruitment agencies, but to less effect. Advertising at QCs was low on the employers recruitment targets and some clarified they did not advertise in these locations at all. Others who did, did so in collaboration with the MoLSW) None of the respondents said they partnered with any CSOs or NGOs to link up with job seekers.

Documentation is required from the candidates by all employers when taking on new staff. Requirements included by employers are an education certificate – or skills development certificate; police certificate; family book or ID (to prove the age of the candidate, that they are not underage); recommendation letter from a previous employer. One employer reported outsourcing verification of official documents to a third party. Some employers also required a CV from the candidate.

4.3 Access to information, social protection and services

4.3.1 Summary and key findings

KEY FINDING 3.1 Social media was the most common way of receiving information about COVID-19 and migration related information.

This is primarily communicated through social media pages and community groups and by messages from friends or family in Thailand. Similarly, having access to the internet, a mobile phone and following the government social media accounts were the best ways to ease access to information about COVID-19 and migration related topics. It is clear that far less people are receiving information via their employers, colleagues, recruitment agencies or brokers in contrast to online forms of communication. This allows for both rapid dissemination of the latest news and for unreliable or false information to spread rapidly. It is critical that official organisations keep up to date with the latest developments and are at the forefront in delivering accurate information.

Accessing Laotian interpreters are not a distinct feature of the migrant worker experience. Few migrants indicated using an interpreter at key points in their journey.

KEY FINDING 3.2 Only 17 per cent of returning migrants were confident that they were enrolled in the Social Security Fund (SSF) while abroad, a further six per cent were unsure.

A small minority chose to use other forms of health insurance or the Compulsory Migrant Health Insurance scheme (CMHI). These findings indicate that there is little investment in understanding the different schemes available and how they relate to the various forms of work documentation. It appears that migrants see

little benefit in the current arrangement of social security and insurance schemes that are available.

KEY FINDING 3.3 Of those who were enrolled in the SSF, the vast majority considered themselves eligible for some form of benefits during their stay, yet 29 per cent of these did not access these benefits.

89 per cent considered themselves entitled to sickness benefits, followed by maternity and unemployment. This reveals that migrants who are confident that they are enrolled in social security schemes are likely to understand when they are eligible for support and most will seek support. Further findings reveal that the majority did not find the process difficult. Those who did have difficulty accessing benefits explained that they couldn't understand the process. While less than a quarter of migrants are confidently enrolled in the SSF, those who are enrolled are confident to access and use benefits.

KEY FINDING 3.4 The primary reason for not enrolling in any social security or health insurance scheme was that migrants did not know how to access it.

The majority of migrants have a limited understanding of the schemes. One third even saying that they have not heard of health insurance before. The gap analysis highlighted that the process for enrolling in such schemes was complicated and this deterred many migrants from investing in understanding and contributing to such schemes. This has been confirmed to a degree but it is more evident that there is a complete lack of knowledge about social security. Many migrants are being left vulnerable as a result.

KEY FINDING 3.5 A third of migrants received communication about safe migration practices while in the quarantine centres. Nearly all had easy methods of communicating with family from with the centres.

The quarantine centres have been identified as a place of opportunity for disseminating information about safe migration, vocational skills, and reintegration supports. It appears that this opportunity is beginning to be realized by the relevant actors. Very few migrants indicated that it was difficult for their family to contact them while they were in the centre. This infers that they have regular access to communication channels that could be used for disseminating necessary migration and re-integration information.

KEY FINDING 3.6 Only two per cent of migrants were confident in their understanding of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons law.

It is clear that there is a very low level of understanding about this topic, as 45 per cent of migrants reported that they had not heard of it before. In contrast 54 per cent had heard of the law but did not know much about it. There is a significant opportunity to increase understanding in this area.

KEY FINDING 3.7 More than three quarters of returning migrants did not attend any pre-departure or post-arrival training, yet they were widely considered to be helpful.

Post arrival training was nearly twice as common as pre-departure training. These trainings were almost equally delivered by recruitment agencies and government ministries, despite a significant number being unsure. Nearly 40 per cent considered the training “very helpful”, these are promising results and indicate the potential of increased pre-departure/post-arrival training.

KEY FINDING 3.8 The most desired topic for pre-departure and post-arrival training was job skills.

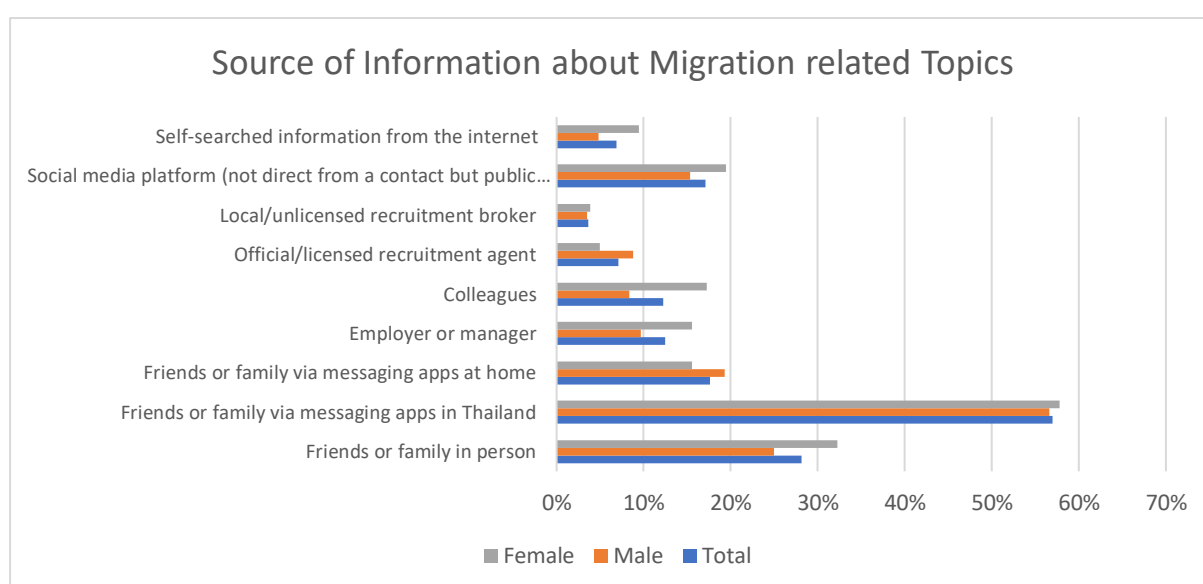
This was followed by employment rights and protections and then explanation of health and unemployment insurances. These are encouraging findings that indicate migrants are interested in learning these topics. It appears the central focus is still on accessing employment and income before being able to consider matters of resilience and risk. It is clear that sector specific training that could incorporate relevant job skills would be well received.

4.3.2 COVID-19 and Migration Information

Most of the migrants interviewed (62 per cent) use social media platforms to access information about COVID-19 news, border closures, guidance, and regulations. Apart from social media platform, approximately 30 per cent of the migrants mentioned receiving COVID-19 related information from their friends via messaging apps, employers, and colleagues.

In terms of accessing the migration information, 57 per cent of the migrants stated that they reach out to their friends or family in Thailand via messaging apps to get migration related information. Whereas another 28 per cent of migrants mentioned that they reach out to their friends and family in person to get the required information.

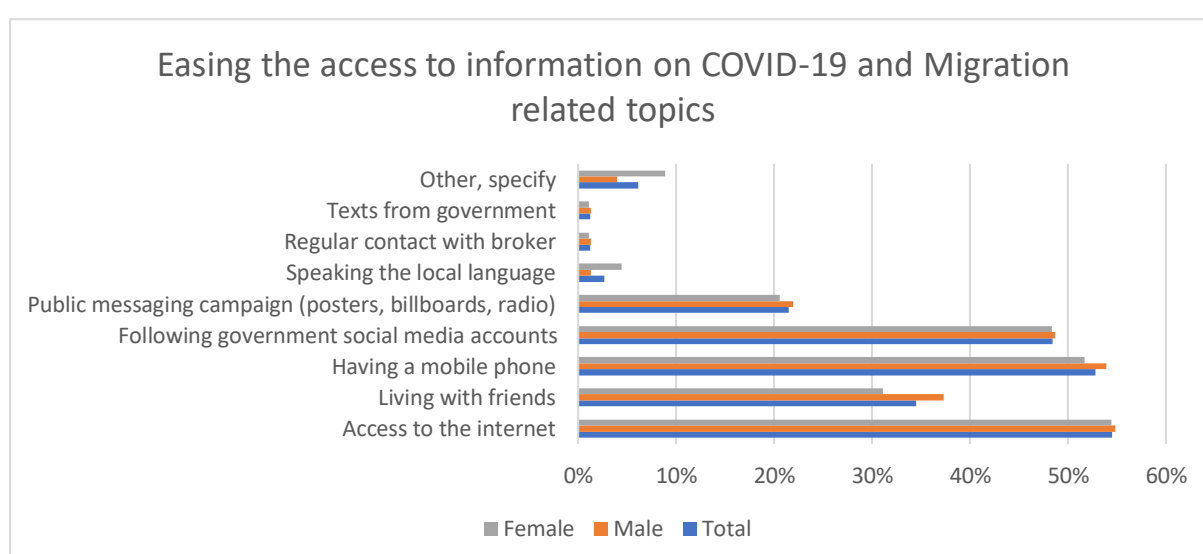
Figure 4-25 Migration Information Source



48 percent of surveyed migrants reported that they got to know about social protection and social services accessible to them through their employer. This was also true for migrant workers working across several sectors including construction, manufacturing and agriculture. The only significant exception was that of migrants involved in domestic work - 33 per cent reported that they learnt about social protection and social services accessible to them, through their friends and family via messaging apps in Thailand.

Over half (55 per cent) of migrants said that internet access would help them easily learn about the COVID-19 and migration related topics. Whereas 53 percent of the migrants reported having a mobile phone would help them to easily access the required information while 48 per cent said that following government social media accounts would help them to easily access the required information.

Figure 4-26 Easing Access to Information

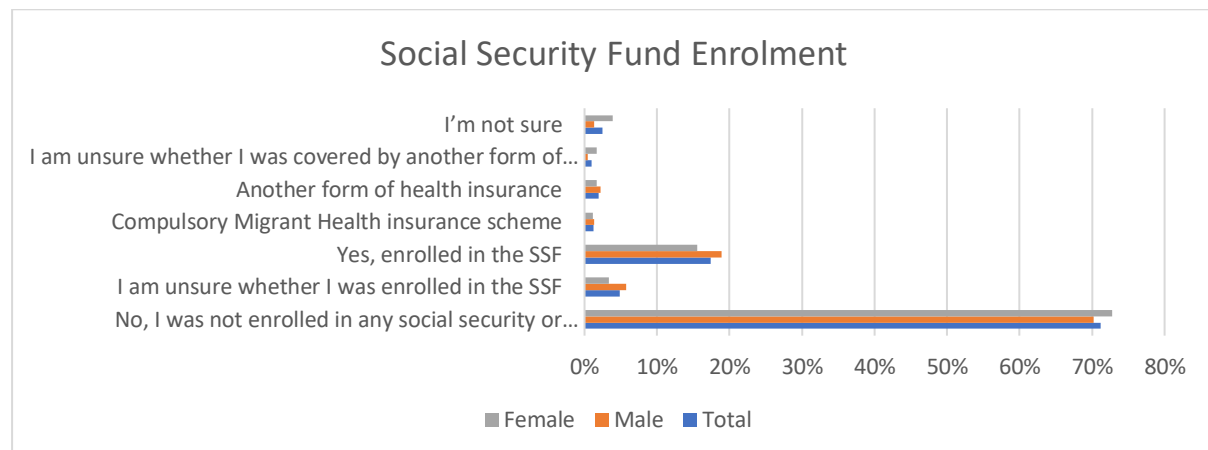


4.3.3 Social Security Fund or Insurance Scheme

One of the biggest challenges faced by the migrants was enrolling in the host country's social security fund

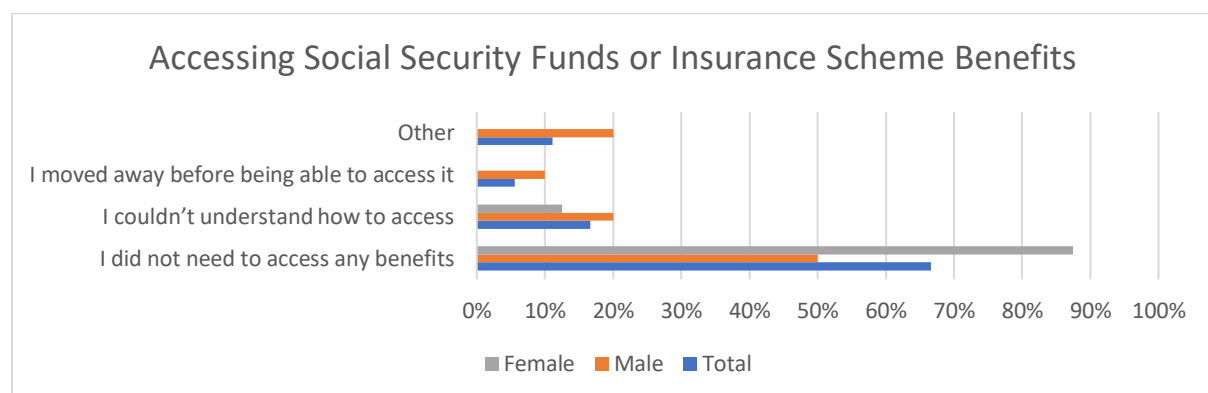
or any other insurance schemes. 71 per cent of the surveyed migrants said that they were not enrolled in any social security or insurance scheme. Only a modest 17 per cent said that they were enrolled in the host country's social security fund. Of those who were enrolled in the social security fund 89 per cent reported that they made regular contributions into the fund or other insurance scheme. Also, 89 per cent reported to access the benefits of the social security fund or insurance scheme during their sickness.

Figure 4-27 Social Security Fund Enrolment



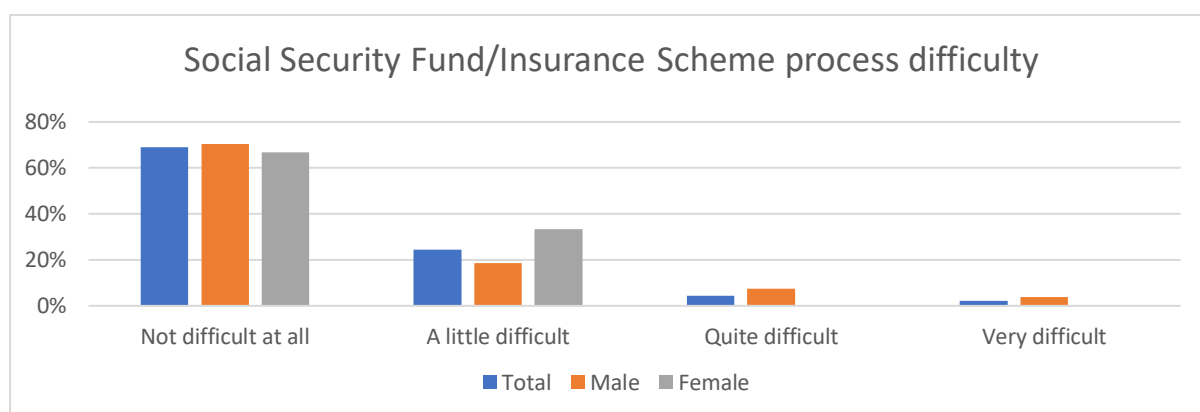
Of those who did not access the benefits, 67 per cent reported that they did not need to access the benefits.

Figure 4-28 Accessing Benefits



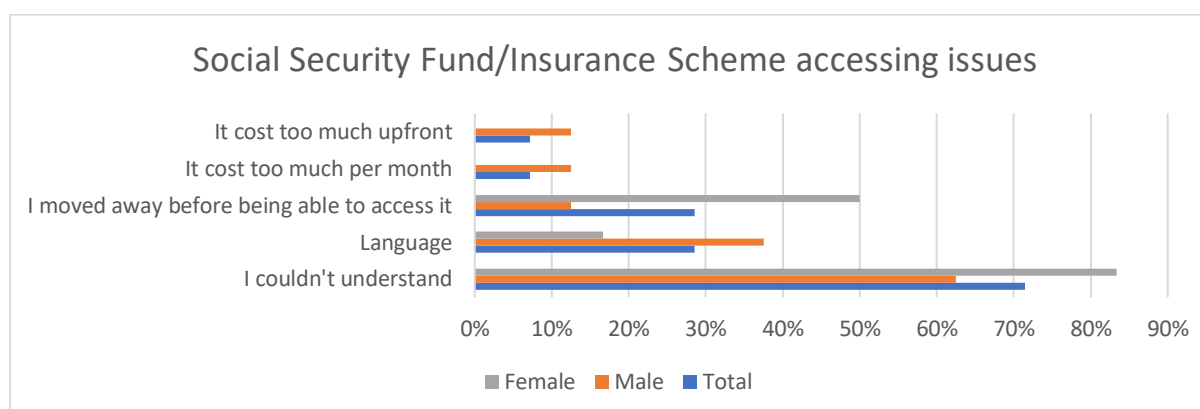
Of those migrants who accessed the benefits of the social security fund or insurance scheme, 69 per cent reported that they didn't find the process difficult, whereas 30 per cent reported that they found the process little to very difficult.

Figure 4-29 Process Difficulty



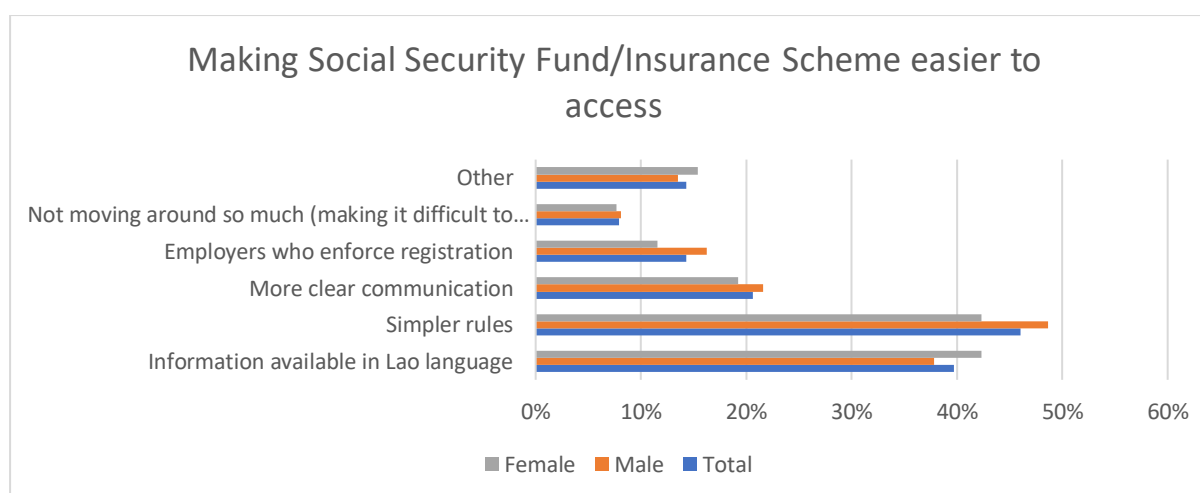
71 per cent of those who faced difficulty accessing the benefits of social security fund or insurance scheme reported the main reason being not able to understand the scheme. 29 per cent reported language as the principal difficulty.

Figure 4-30 Accessing Issues



Migrants reported that making access easier to the social security fund or insurance scheme would help them. 46 per cent indicated simpler rules would help them, with 40 per cent of those surveyed citing information in Lao language as the biggest difference in how they can gain easier access to these services.

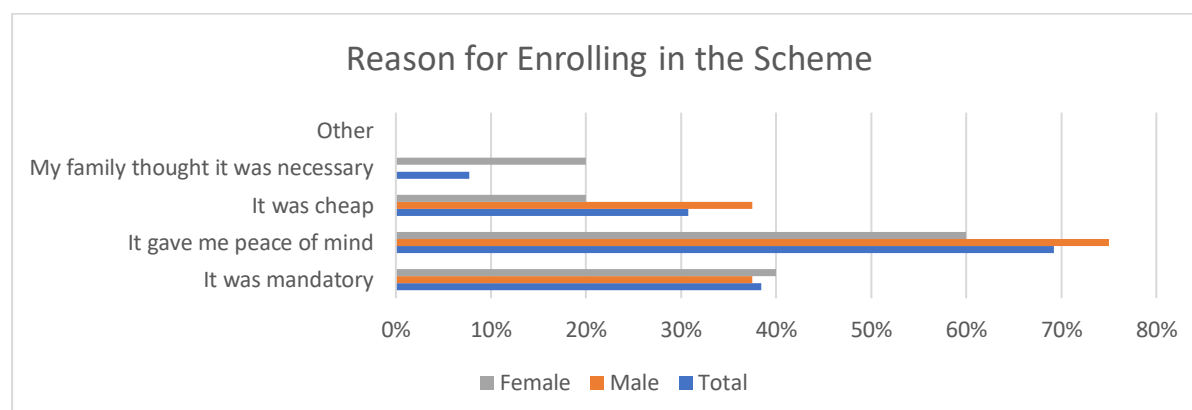
Figure 4-31 Ease of Access



69 per cent of migrants who enrolled in the social security fund or insurance scheme reported that enrolling

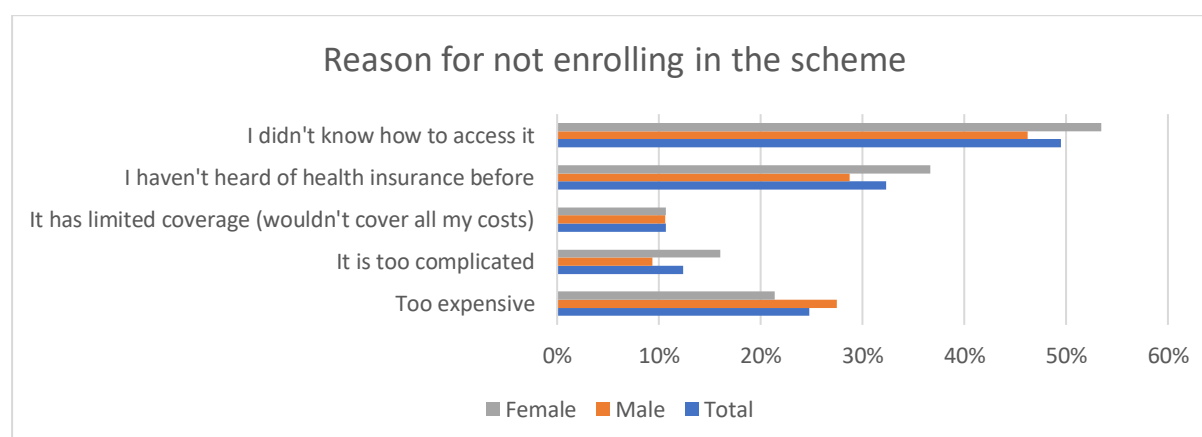
gave them a peace of mind, while 38 per cent said that enrolling in such schemes was mandatory for them.

Figure 4-32 Enrolment Reasons



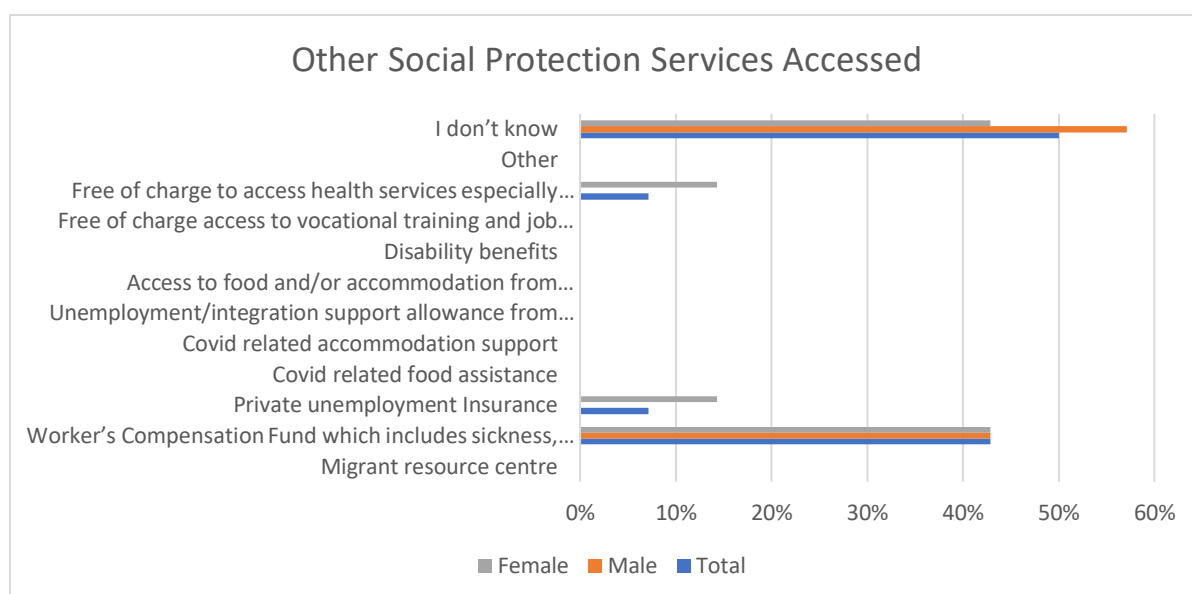
49 per cent of those migrants who did not enrol in the social security fund or insurance scheme reported that they did not know how to access the schemes, while 25 per cent said that enrolling in such schemes was too expensive for them.

Figure 4-33 Non-Enrolment Reasons



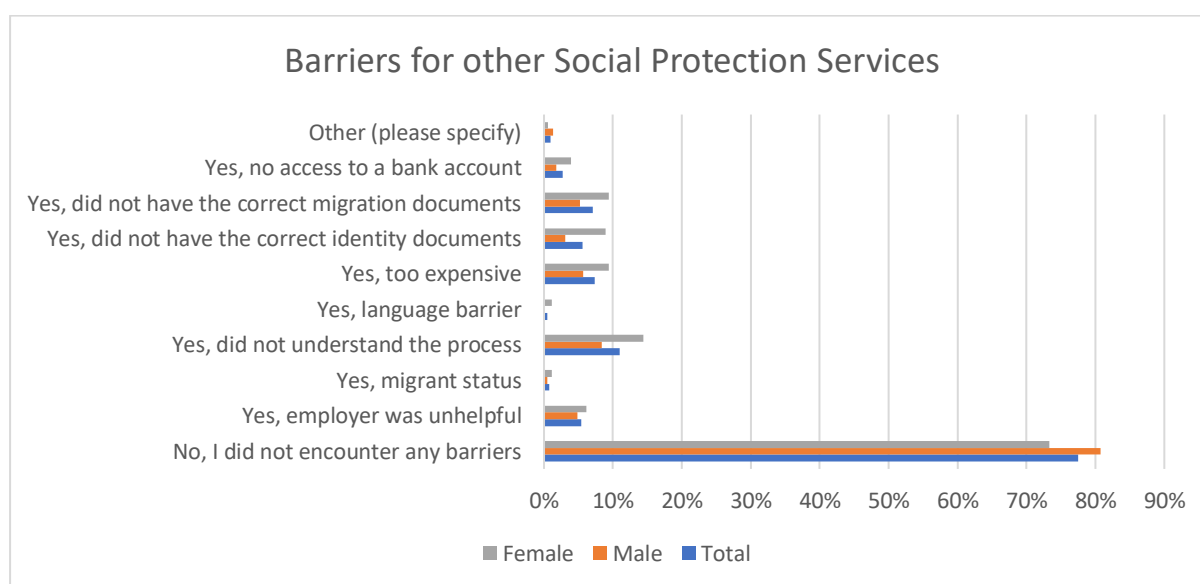
The majority of the migrants surveyed, reported that they did not access any other social protection services that were not included with the social security fund or health insurance. Only one per cent said that they accessed other social protection services not included with a social security fund or health insurance. Of these, 43 per cent (six people) reported that they accessed the worker's compensation fund.

Figure 4-34 Other Benefits Access



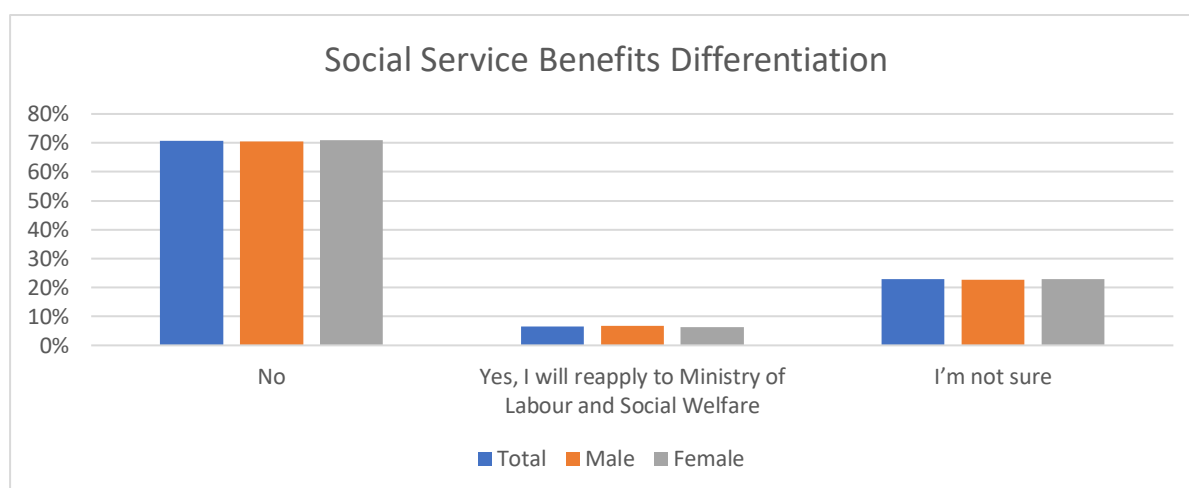
Of the migrants who accessed the other social protection services, 78 per cent reported that they did not encounter any barriers while accessing these services. Whereas 11 per cent reported that they encountered problems as they did not understand the process.

Figure 4-35 Benefits Barriers



However, when we compare these social protection services abroad and those accessible in Lao People's Democratic Republic, 71 per cent of those surveyed reported that they won't be able to access similar benefits in Lao People's Democratic Republic to those that they received abroad.

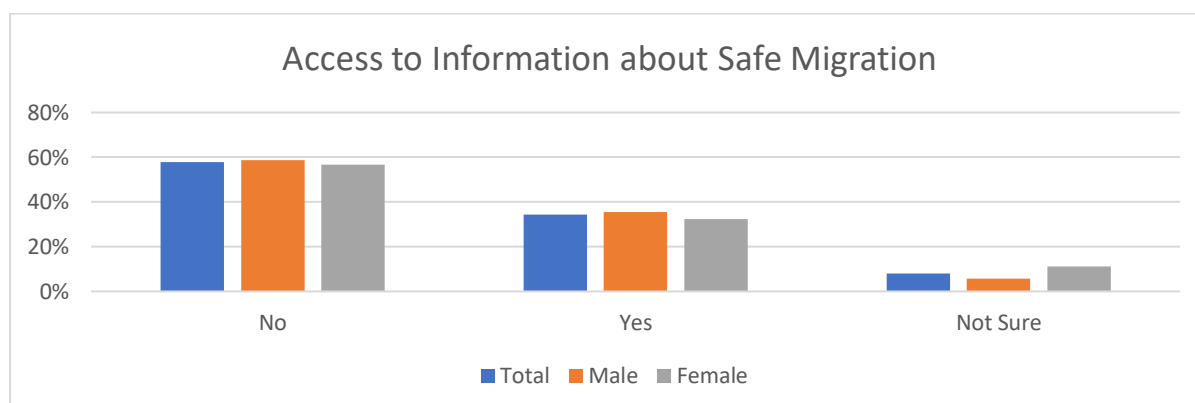
Figure 4-36 Benefits Differentiation



4.3.4 Shelter/Quarantine Centre

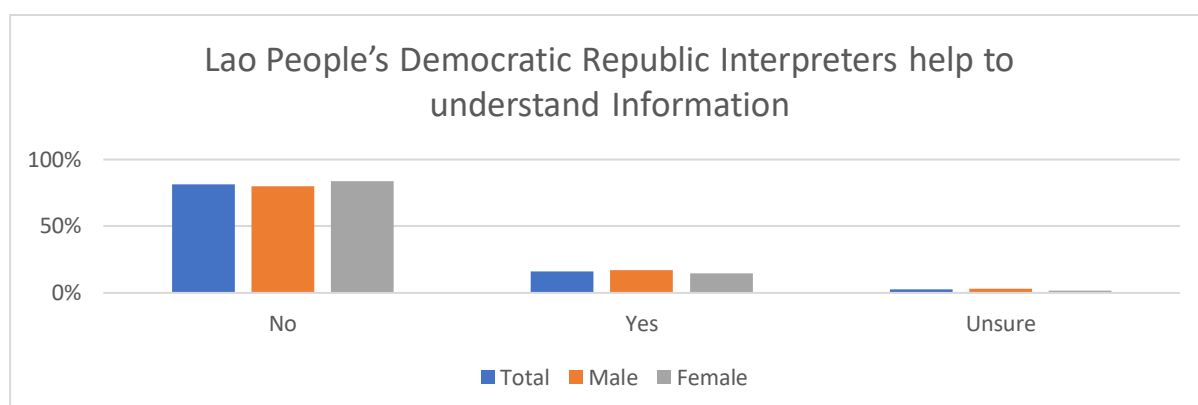
More than half of the migrants (58 per cent) reported that they did not receive any information about safe migration while in shelters in Thailand/abroad and QCs in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Whereas about 34 per cent of the migrants reported that they did receive the necessary information. Responses were very consistent between men and women for all shelter related questions.

Figure 4-37 Access to Migration Information



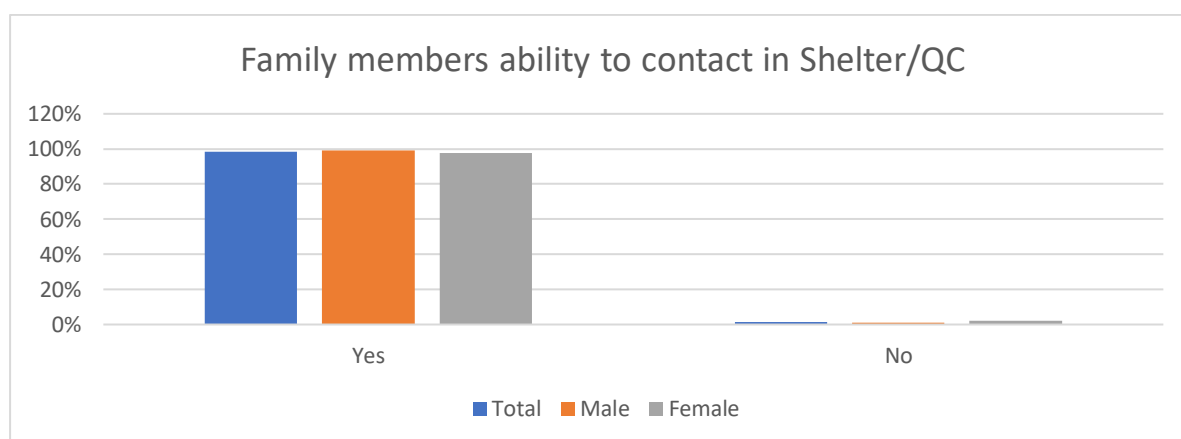
81 per cent of the migrants reported that there weren't any Lao interpreters that could help them understand the information from the host country officials, while only 16 per cent said that they received help from the Lao People's Democratic Republic interpreters to understand the information.

Figure 4-38 Help Understanding Information



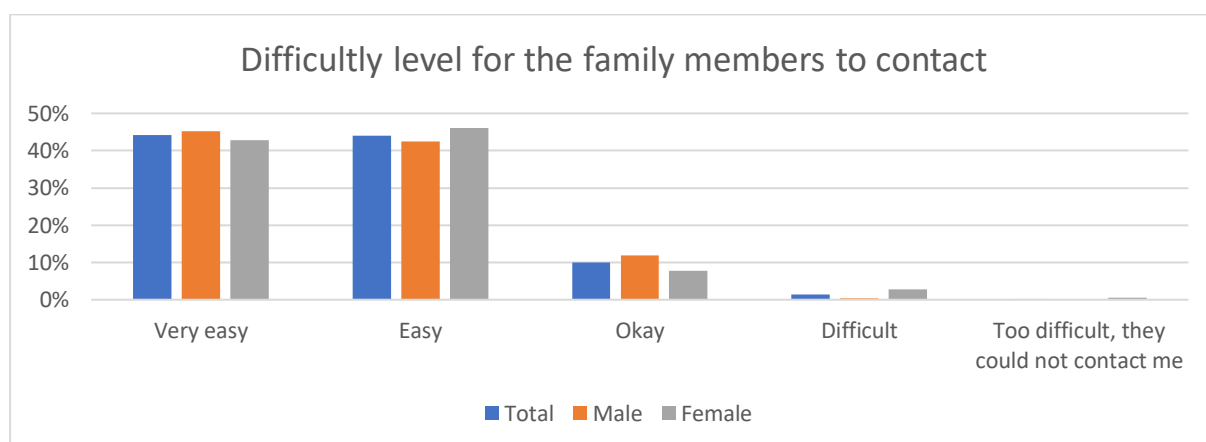
Almost all the migrants (99 per cent) reported that their family members were able to contact them while they were in the shelter/QC.

Figure 4-39 Contact Ability in Shelter/QC



Majority of the migrants (88 per cent) reported that it was relatively easier for their family members to contact them while they were in the shelter/QC. Whereas only one per cent stated that it was difficult for their family members to contact them.

Figure 4-40 Contact Difficulty Level

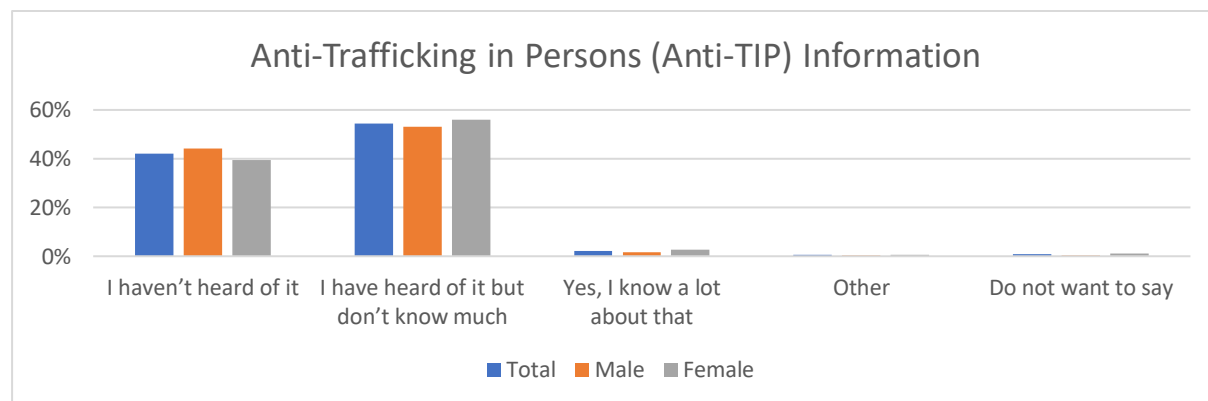


4.3.5 Laws and Training Information

More than half of the migrants (55 per cent) reported that they had heard about the Anti-Trafficking in

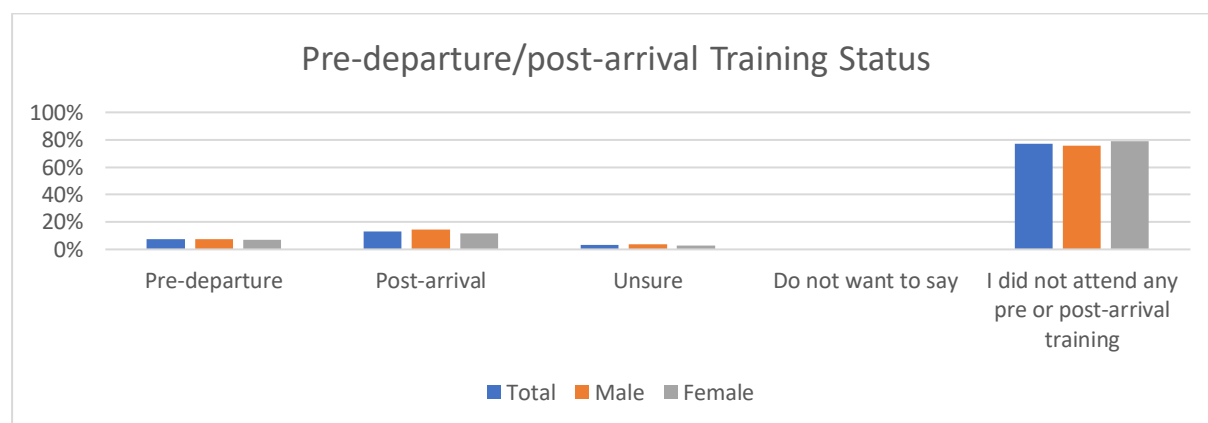
Persons (Anti-TIP) law in Lao People's Democratic Republic but didn't know much about it. Whereas 42 per cent of the migrants stated that they haven't heard about the law at all. On the other hand, only two per cent reported that were very much aware of the law.

Figure 4-41 Anti-TIP Information



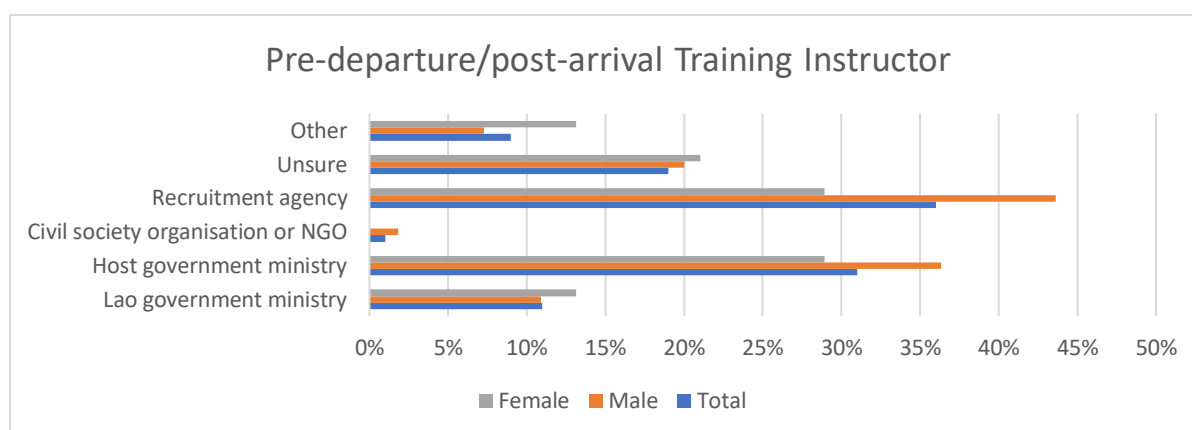
77 per cent of the migrants reported that they did not attend any pre-departure or post-arrival training to the host country. Whereas 13 per cent stated that they attended a post-arrival training while another eight per cent stated that they attended pre-departure training to the host country.

Figure 4-42 Pre-departure/post-arrival Training Status



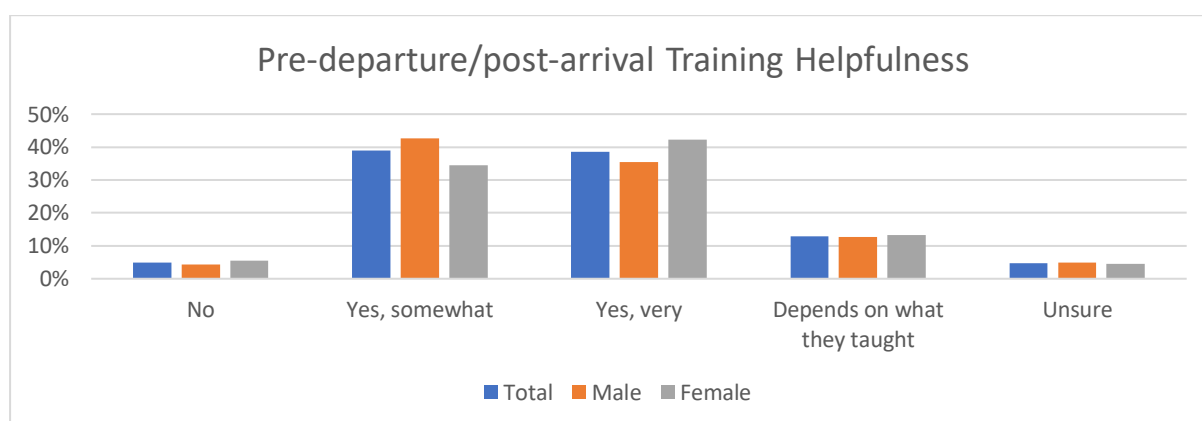
Of all the migrants, 36 per cent reported that the pre-departure or post-arrival training was provided to them by the recruitment agency. Whereas 31 per cent stated that the training was provided to them by the government ministry of the host country while 11 per cent stated that the training was provided to them by the government ministry of Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Figure 4-43 Pre-departure/post-arrival Training Instructor



39 per cent of the migrants reported that the pre-departure or post-arrival training provided to them was somewhat helpful for them. Whereas 39 per cent stated that the trainings provided were very helpful for them while another 13 per cent stated that the helpfulness on the trainings depended on what they were taught.

Figure 4-44 Pre-departure/post-arrival Training Helpfulness



In terms of the helpfulness of the training received, migrants were asked to rank the top three areas in which they found the trainings to be helpful. 39 per cent of the migrants ranked attaining job skills as most helpful aspect, followed by 32 per cent ranking employment protection rights and entitlements, and 38 per cent ranking explanation of health and unemployment insurances as the third most helpful aspect of their training.

Figure 4-45 Training Helpfulness - Rank 1

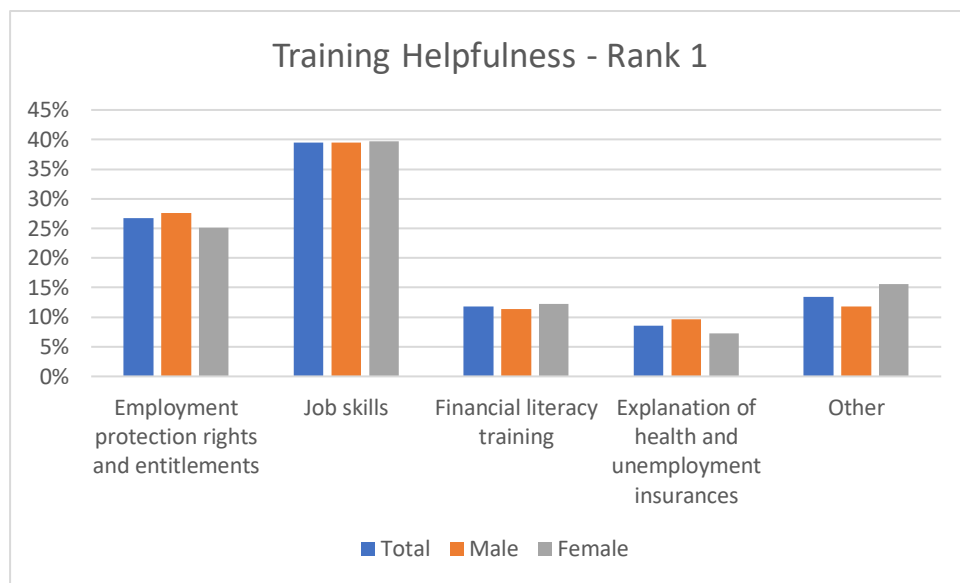


Figure 4-46 Training Helpfulness - Rank 2

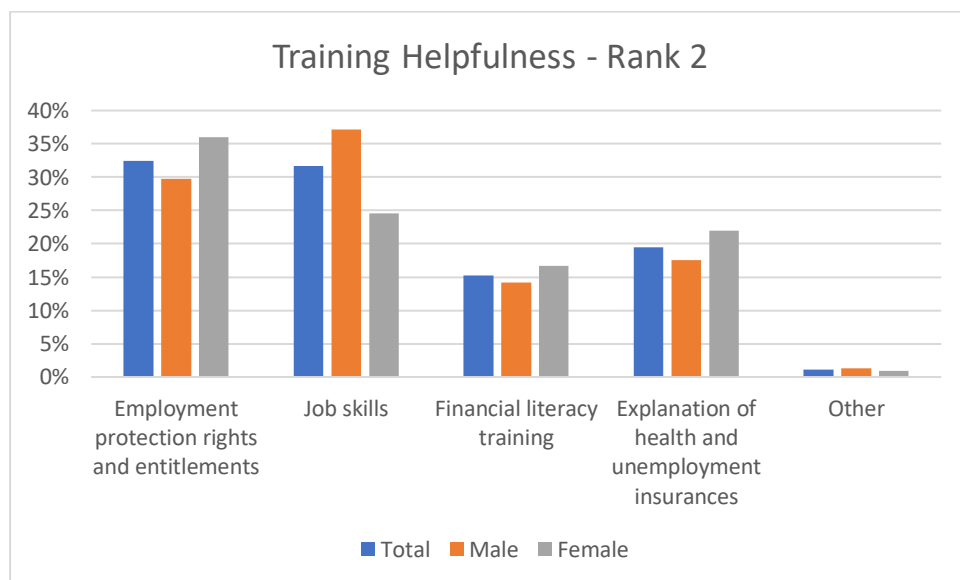
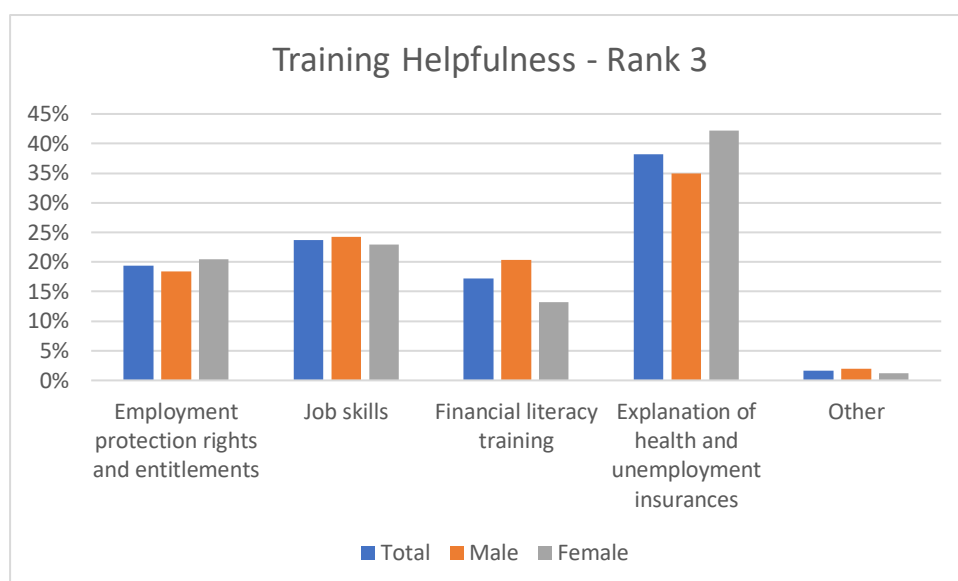


Figure 4-47 Training Helpfulness - Rank 3



4.3.6 Qualitative findings – Access to information

CSOs are operating on the community level to provide information to returning migrants and those considering re-migration. This is a mix of information about migration procedures, gender-based violence, and social protection services. Most of the CSOs described doing this with a focus on women and some offering counselling in tandem with these services. Migrant resource centres are targeting those who have finished their 14-day quarantine period for information and provide regular training including on violence against women.

To reach returning migrants, CSOs are working with district government including the office of labour and social welfare and the office of non-formal education.

All employers operate internal communication systems largely focused on internal message boards and PA systems. It is recognised that not all workers will have access to electronic devices to receive emails and use social media, but messaging can also be communicated via these channels. Company meetings are also mentioned as a way to keep employees up to date. Message content would be from specific company orientated information to updates on government policies and entitlements regarding workers rights.

Employers all reported keeping up to date with government policy and receiving relevant communications from MoLSW. Information regarding employee rights including changes and revisions made to the relevant laws and invitations to attend certain meetings when the laws are revised.

4.3.7 Qualitative findings - Social Security Protection Programmes

All employers agreed the health and welfare of their workforce was important and most of the employers were able to confirm some protection schemes they had in place. These included health insurance; safety insurance; overtime policies; paid sick leave; paid maternity leave. Some employers noted that their social

security measures were pursuant to the law set out by the government and they received assistance in providing information for the employees. The social security deductions are paid for by the employer and the employee. One employer also noted the government send a work environment team every year to the workplace to check lighting, air quality, noise levels and the drinking water supply to ensure the environment is satisfactory.

Some employers apply additional levels of protection for their workforce. One employer mentioned they are registered with the SA8000 certification programme, an auditable certification standard that encourages organisations to develop, maintain, and apply socially acceptable practices in the workplace. The same company is also a member of an industry specific organisation specialising in worker welfare. Another has an internal communications programme for a committee representing the employees to meet regularly with the management team where any issues can be raised.

All employers reported following the government guidelines for social protection programmes and ensuring they kept up to date with developments. Information pertaining to changes in policy or entitlements are communicated with workers through internal communication channels. Employers received communications from the MoLSW. However, almost all responded that they did not receive any information from the government or CSOs/NGOs regarding social protection and services available to employees, this was left for the company to disseminate to their employees.

4.3.8 Qualitative findings - Mental and Physical Wellbeing Programmes

Employers show a high degree of care for the welfare of their workers. One company has a permanent on-site medical clinic staffed with two doctors and two nurses. Employees can use the services at the clinic free of charge. The company also provide free lunches for all employees. Another company ensures all workers have an annual health check.

In the wake of COVID-19 employers have introduced additional layers to protect their workforce and ensure the workplace is a safe place. One employer provided 500K kip upon completion of vaccination another understood their workers were afraid of the vaccine and produced information programmes to educate their staff. Working in collaboration with the government to organise which vaccine centres could be used, the company scheduled appointments to send groups of workers together once fears were alleviated through the communication programme – this company has to date achieved 98% vaccination rate.

4.3.9 Qualitative findings - Reporting Channels

Universally the employers said they offered safe reporting channels for their workers on all matters. Most of the employers used a 'comments box' system where boxes are situated around the factories for employees to anonymously submit comments, complaints and suggestions. Employees can also address issues directly with management, human resources or through trade unions. Committees made up of employee representatives and management can then discuss these issues. One company has a specific committee which represents the employees, management and the committee will meet regularly to discuss any issues raised by individuals or groups of employees.

4.4 Return and reintegration

4.4.1 Summary and key findings

KEY FINDING 4.1 79 per cent of migrants returned home in a sudden or unplanned fashion. The vast majority cited COVID-19 related issues as their reasons for returning.

Concern about COVID-19 infection and a desire to be at home with family during this time were the primary reasons for return. While job losses played a significant role in many migrants' decisions, it was surpassed by concern about the disease which was more widely reported to be a reason for return. If COVID-19 had not changed their plans the majority had planned to stay at least two years. This provides interesting insight into migrant worker lifestyles that can be used to tailor documentation and predeparture training. Staying long term gives greater opportunities to pay off debts, send remittances and reduce costs. Having the length of their stay reduced so drastically will have left many migrants financially vulnerable when debt and remittances findings are considered.

KEY FINDING 4.2 Most migrants were satisfied with their experience at the border checkpoints.

More than 85 per cent of migrants reported that their experience was "adequate" or "good" while 11 per cent stated that it was "poor". This latter figure coincides with the 11 per cent that were asked to pay overstay fines or costs when leaving their host country. Concerningly, less than 50 per cent did not define a reason other than that they were asked to. In addition, these fines most commonly ranged from 1,000 to 4,000 THB. Qualitative interviews suggested that the government had granted amnesty to anyone returning without proper documentation in an effort to regularise COVID-19 return migration. This may infer several fines were illegitimate or poorly communicated. In contrast, at least 25 per cent of the total number of people migrants crossing the border highlighted that their experience was good because they felt safe and there were clear instructions from officials.

KEY FINDING 4.3 75 per cent of migrants considered their experience in the quarantine centres to be "good" or "very good".

Poor conditions in the quarantine centres had been highlighted by the gap analysis and within CSO interviews but highlighted issues were found to be much less common than anticipated through the quantitative study. The primary reasons for satisfaction include, satisfactory food and water, friendly and helpful staff and clean accommodation. Despite low numbers of issues experienced by migrants, they should not be overlooked. Of the five per cent of migrants who had a poor experience, many faced severe challenges, such as lack of access to sanitation and hygiene facilities, lack of access to adequate food and water and even threats and bribes from authorities. Some conditions raised by CSOs were not felt amongst this population of migrants and could be related to this study's focus on particular quarantine centres and hence does not capture the wider problems.

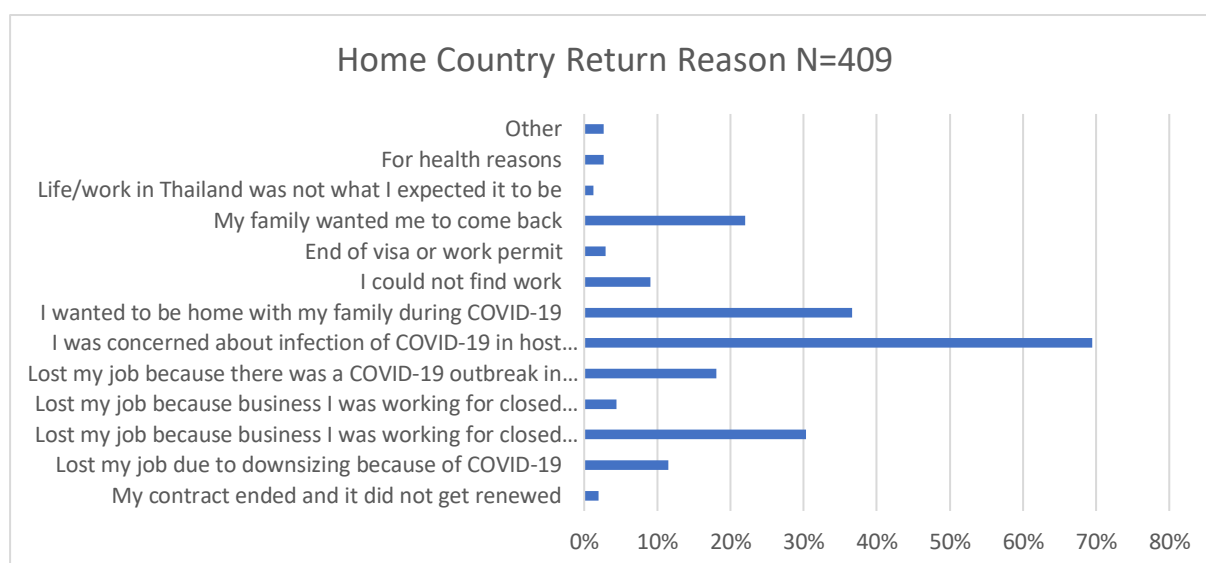
KEY FINDING 4.4 There is great uncertainty for migrants reintegrating into their communities. They face a diverse range of challenges in their reintegration.

The most common issue for migrants to face is economic; a lack of income. This is followed by social challenges, many returning migrants highlighted that they expect to face a negative response from friends, family or community. Women faced additional challenges including finding housing, repayment of debts and physical health problems. The vast majority of migrants did not have prior arrangements for a job in Lao People's Democratic Republic. This explains the high levels of concern about employment and income. Moreover, of those who did organise work, migrants were either returning to their own business or to work with a family member or friend, there were only a handful of exceptions. It would be safe to conclude that returning migrants overwhelmingly did not have an opportunity to find work in Lao People's Democratic Republic and as one of the CSO interviewees stated "they are starting again with nothing". Migrants express very low levels of confidence in finding employment. It appears as though many intend to work in subsistence farming as suggested by the gap analysis and the high proportion of migrants planning to work in agriculture.

4.4.2 Decision to return

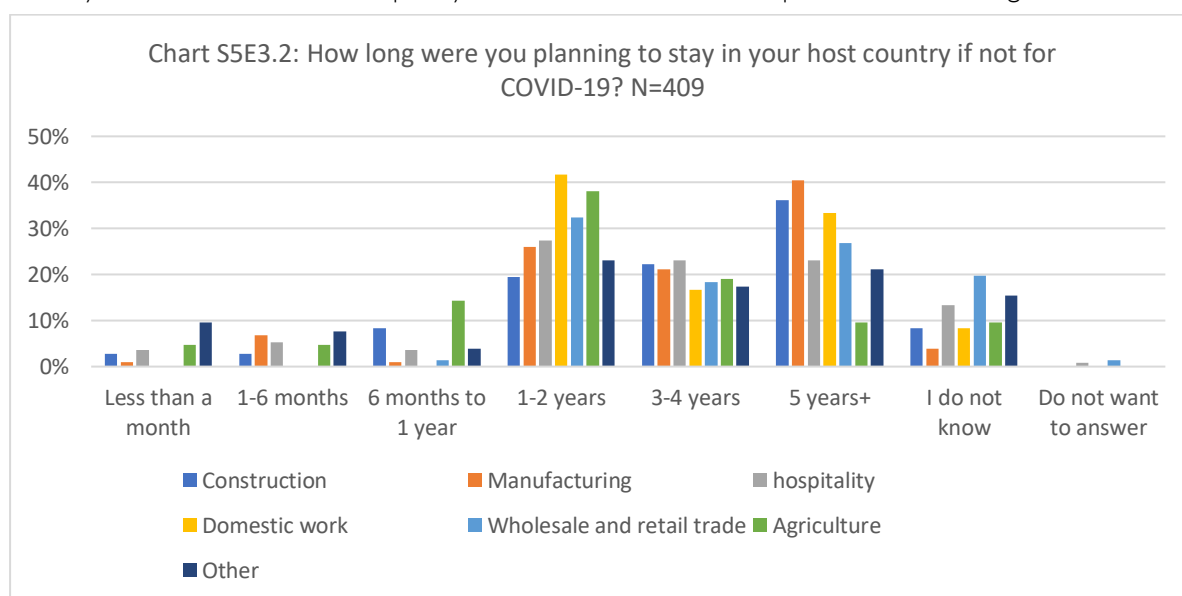
79 per cent of returning migrants reported that their return was sudden and unplanned, only 21 per cent planning their return. There were no significant differences between male or female returnees in this regard. The decision to return was motivated by a combination of factors, most prevalent being a desire to avoid COVID-19 infection in Thailand (69 per cent of people reported this being a factor). The next most common reasons cited were a desire to be with family during COVID-19 (37 per cent), job loss due to temporary closures (30 per cent) and again that their family wanted them to return (20 per cent). In addition to those who lost their jobs due to temporary closures, a further 18 per cent lost their job because there was a covid outbreak in their workplace and an additional 11 per cent lost their work as a result of COVID downsizing. In total, this reflects that up to 59 per cent of the migrants lost their jobs while abroad as a result of COVID-19. Remaining answers included not being able to find work (nine per cent), end of visa/work permit (three per cent) and health reasons (three per cent).

Figure 4-48 Home Country Return Reason



A significant proportion (19 per cent) of migrants reported that they experienced delays as a result of COVID. The most common reason for these delays was overcrowding at the border (56 per cent), followed by delays in processing (29 per cent). 16 per cent reported that it was too expensive to leave at the height of the pandemic. A diverse set of other reasons were responsible for the remaining answers (26 per cent).

If not for covid, most migrant workers were planning on staying in their host countries long term. Only 11 per cent were planning on staying less than a year, while 28 per cent planned to stay one or two years and 50 per cent planned on staying at least three years. A small number did not know how long they planned to stay (11 per cent). Most sectors of employment revealed similar intentions to stay between three and five years but results diverged beyond five years. Migrants employed in sectors such as construction, manufacturing and domestic work reported above average intention to stay beyond five years in their host country while sectors such as hospitality, retail and other services reported below average.

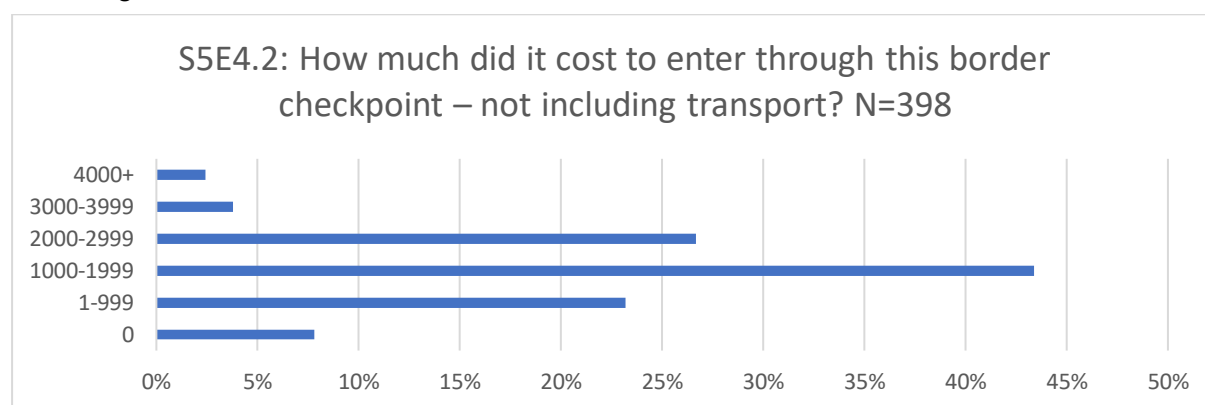


4.4.3 Return journey – border checkpoints

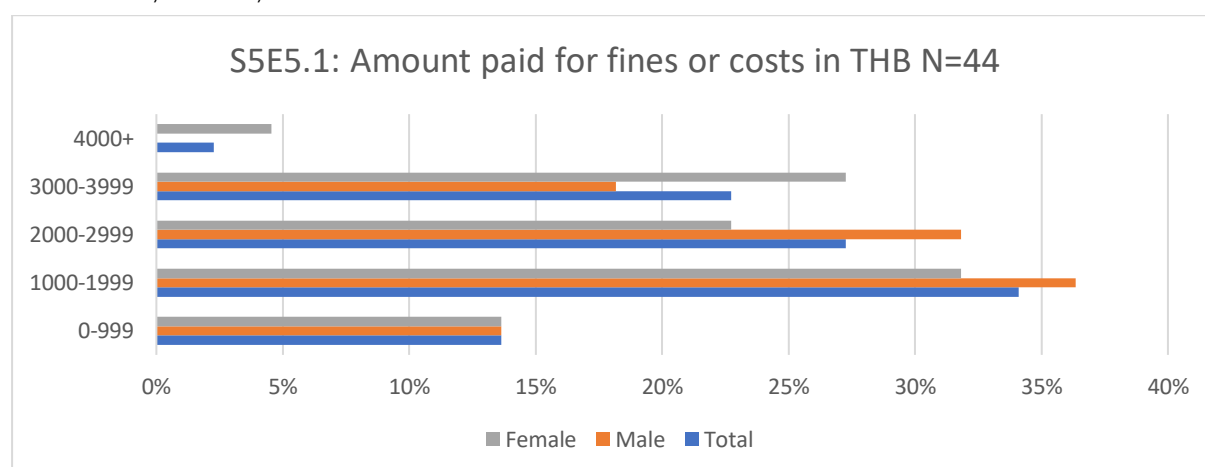
All migrants returned through international border checkpoints. The primary point of entry was Friendship bridge II (78 per cent), followed by Friendship bridge I (14 per cent). Only eight per cent of people returned through a different checkpoint. This result is influenced heavily by the locations in which migrant interviews took place with the majority of these interviews taking place in Savannakhet (please see demographic summary and limitations for more information).

Family and friends were the most common way that people heard about these checkpoints. Social media was another considerable source of information. Few people relied on employers, brokers or other sources of information regarding the border situation.

Returning migrants reported a range of different costs to enter through these checkpoints. While the average cost of entry was 1,275 THB, answers ranged from, 0 (no cost) to 4,000 THB with a handful being 5,000 or greater.



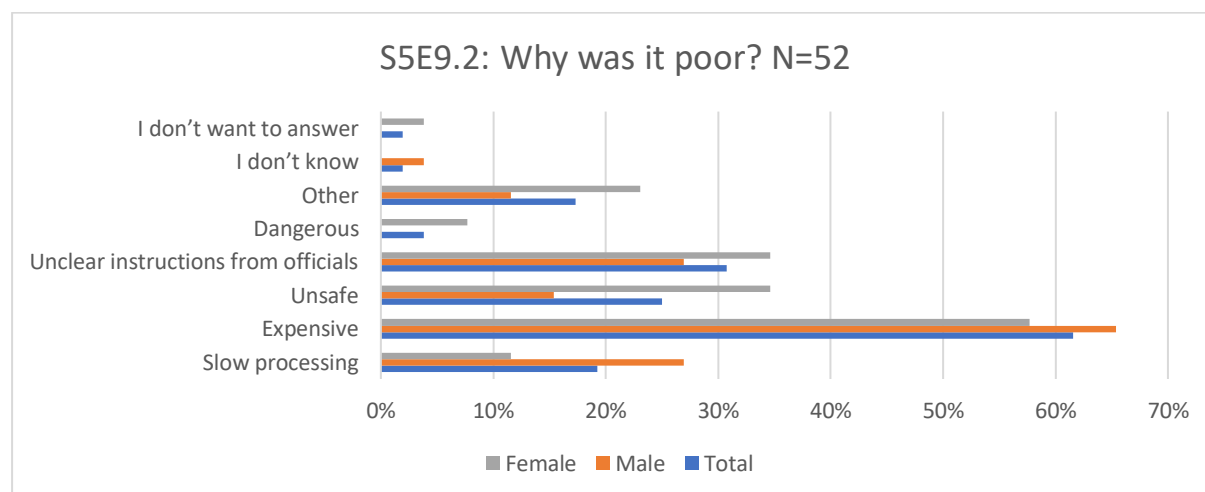
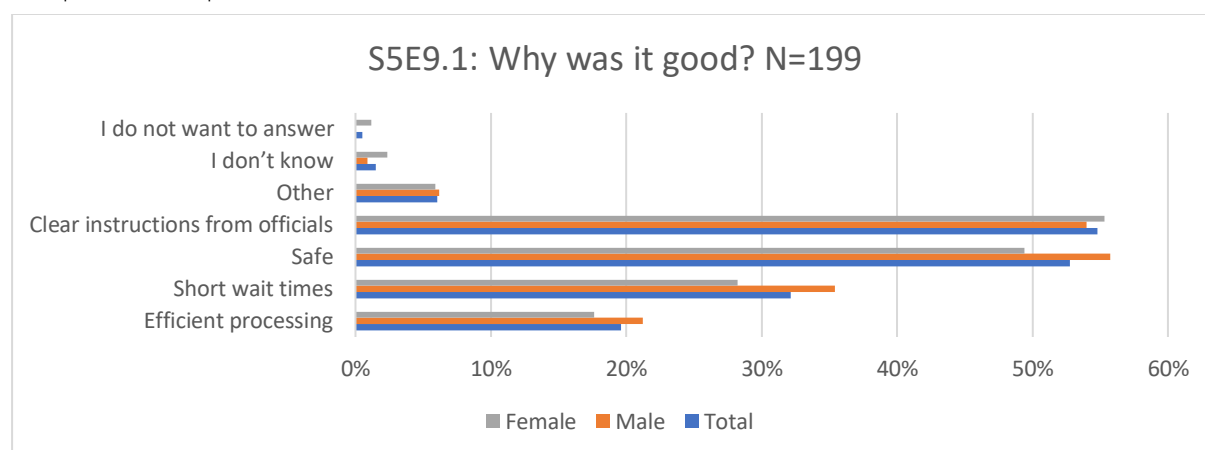
A small proportion (11 per cent) were asked to pay overstay fines or costs when leaving their host country. Similarly, the price of these varied considerably. Women were more likely to have to pay larger fines than men. The large majority of migrants did not give any reasons why they had to pay these fines other than they were told by host country authorities. 27 per cent of those who received a fine, stated that the reason was that they overstayed their work visa.



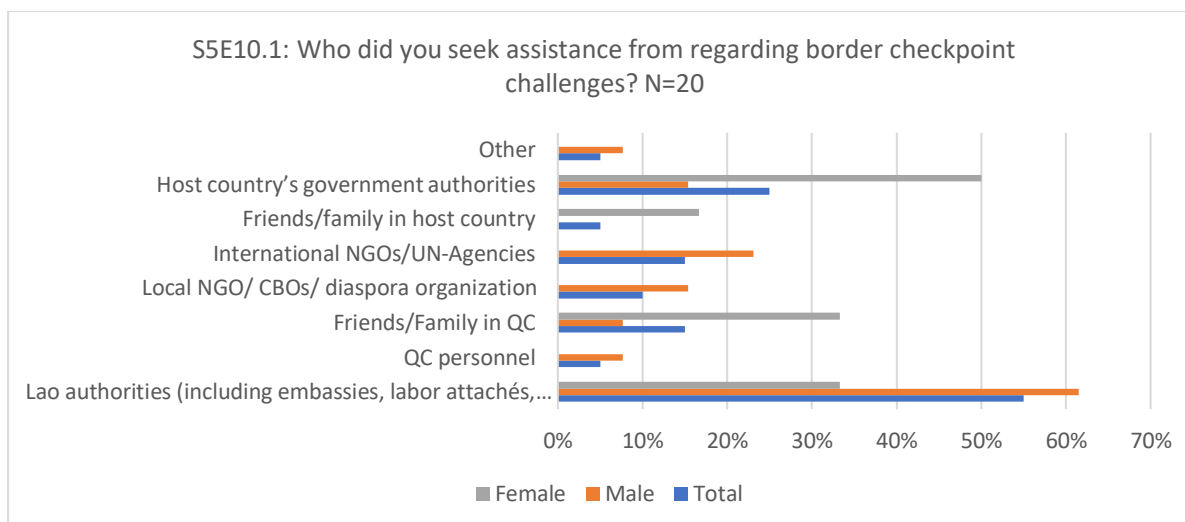
Very few required accommodations at the border (three per cent). From the small sample that did, it

appears that accommodation usually cost less than 1,000 THB.

In summary, the vast majority of migrants reported the experience at the border checkpoint to be adequate or good. The most common answer was “good” (47 per cent), followed by adequate (39 per cent), while few people answered “poor” (11 per cent). Only a handful reported very good or very poor. The main reasons for positive answers related to clear instructions (55 per cent), safety (53 per cent), short wait times (32 per cent), and efficient processing (20 per cent). In contrast, the reasons for negative answers were; expensive (62 per cent), unclear instructions (31 per cent), unsafe (25 per cent) and slow processing (19 per cent). Eight respondents explicitly stated examples of Thai authorities being threatening, unfair or accepting bribes. These eight respondents represent two per cent of the overall sample. Furthermore, the experience of safety at the border checkpoint has received different responses between men and women. Of those who felt the experience at the border was poor, 35 per cent of women reported feeling unsafe compared to 15 per cent of men.



5 per cent of respondents sought help or support with challenges relating to the border checkpoints. While this sample size is small, it indicates significant gendered differences when seeking help. Men are nearly twice as likely to seek support from Lao authorities, while women are several times more likely to seek out friends or family in the QCs or host country authorities.



4.4.4 Quarantine centres

In similar results to the debt section above, 91 per cent of returning migrants covered the costs of return migration using their savings. Furthermore, that the most preferential place to borrow from was family or friends. 70 per cent of people indicated that if they were to require extra money for quarantine they would borrow from friends or family. Other solutions involved staying in host country and save (17 per cent) until they could afford to return or take out a loan (seven per cent).

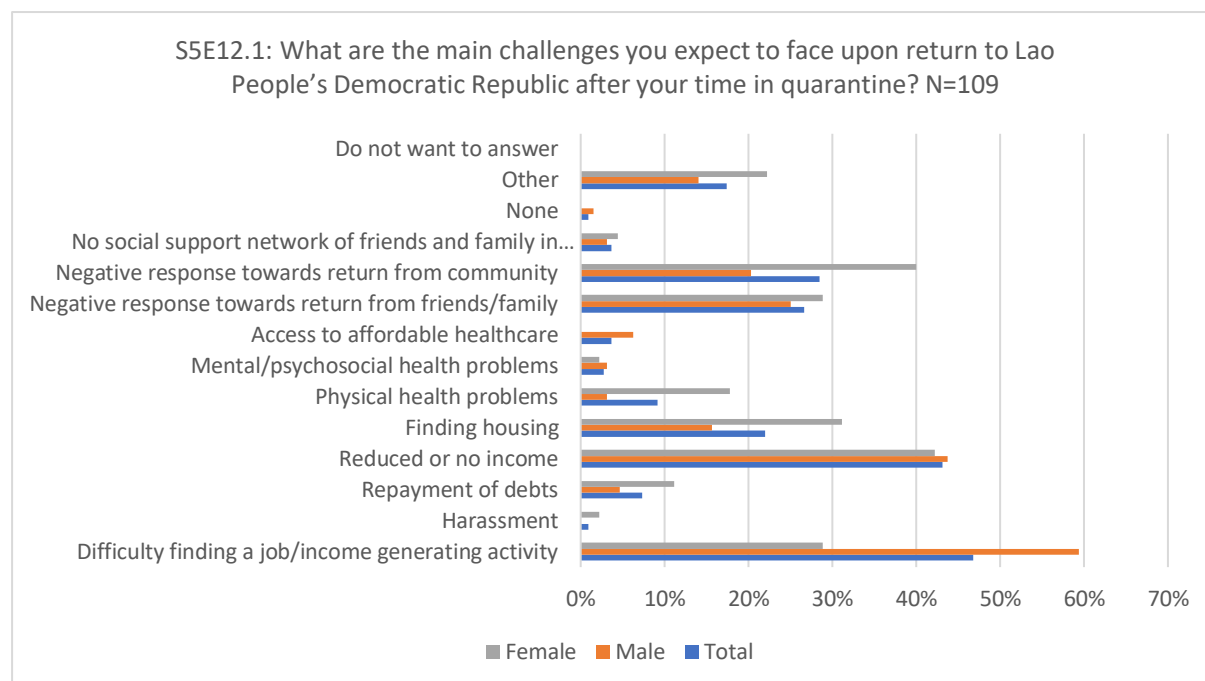
Migrants reported high levels of satisfaction with the quarantine centres. More than three quarters considered their experience to be good (58 per cent) or very good (17 per cent). The remaining answers were adequate (19 per cent), poor (five per cent) and very poor (less than one per cent). Of those who answered that they had a good or very good experience, reasons included; access to satisfactory food and water (82 per cent), helpful and friendly QC staff (47 per cent), clean accommodation (39 per cent), satisfactory access to WaSH (38 per cent) and feeling safe (33 per cent). There was little difference between men and women's responses in regard to these positives. The sample size of those who responded that their experience was poor was small but can give some initial insight to outstanding issues. More than half gave their reasons as a lack of food or water, and that they felt unsafe. Other common answers included a lack of access to WaSH facilities and feeling generally unsupported.

A small number sought assistance regarding issues at the quarantine centres, the majority of these turned to quarantine centre staff. Male respondents were twice as likely to seek help than female respondents (14 per cent and seven per cent). Similarly, the number of men who turned to QC personnel for support was much greater (m. 67 per cent to f. 46 per cent) while those who turned to friends or family was larger for women (f. 38 per cent to m. 12 per cent).

4.4.5 Reintegration

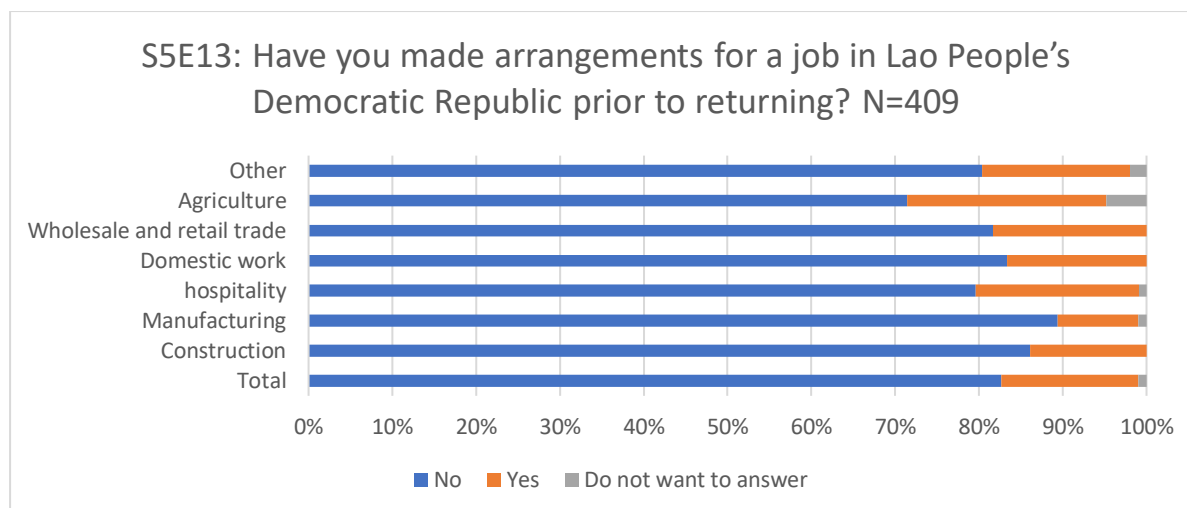
There is great uncertainty in returning home. Many migrants are uncertain about facing challenges when returning to their home villages. Nearly a third (27 per cent) expect to face some challenges while 43 per

cent are unsure whether they will face challenges or not. Only 30 per cent do not expect to face challenges. **Migrants expect to face a diverse range of challenges in their reintegration.** The expectation of these challenges is heavily gendered. Men primarily report challenges relating to income and employment. Women report a greater diversity in challenges, lack of employment, reduced income, lack of housing, and negative reactions from friends, family and community as significant. 11 respondents explicitly noted that they would have to quarantine again, these are recorded in the 'other' category.

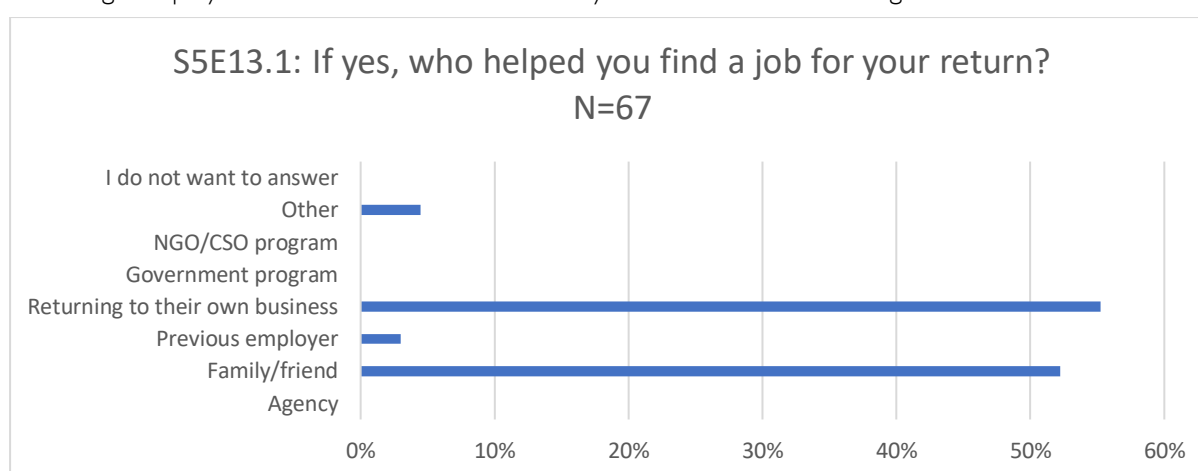


There is limited expectation to receive support for these challenges. 17 per cent of respondents expecting assistance while 79 were not expecting to receive any support for the challenges they faced. Similarly, friends and family were the biggest provider of support (50 per cent), Lao People's Democratic Republic authorities and QC personnel were equal in their responses (both 21 per cent).

The large majority of migrants did not make arrangements for a job in Lao People's Democratic Republic prior to their return. 83 per cent reported that they had no arrangements and 16 per cent responding yes. Migrants employed in different sectors revealed differences in job prospects. Those employed in the manufacturing sector in their host country had the lowest proportion of people who had arranged employment in Lao People's Democratic Republic (ten per cent). This is contrasted to agriculture, in which 24 per cent had arranged employment. This is consistent with gap analysis that stated that most people took employment in the agriculture sector when they returned home, as there were no other jobs.



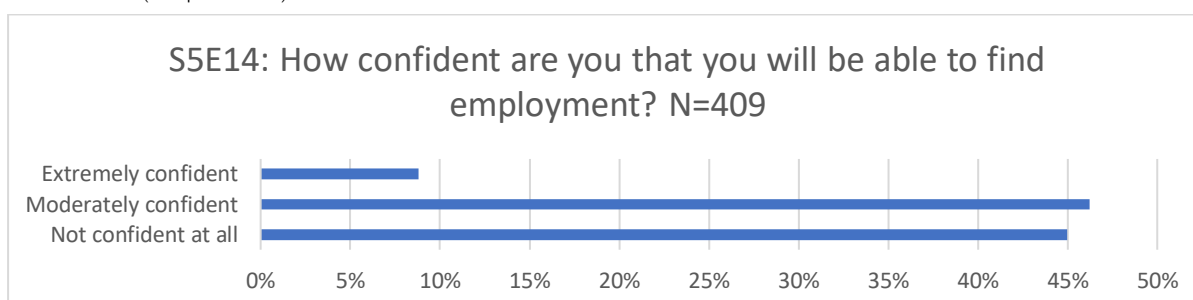
Of those who had organised a job for their return, none had used agency, government or CSO services to arrange employment. Most either relied on family/friends or were returning to their own business.



Agriculture is the primary sector in which people expect to find work on their return to Lao People's Democratic Republic. Agriculture represented 34 per cent of the responses. The next highest was wholesale and retail trade in which 12 per cent expected to find work. This represents a dramatic shift from the sectors in which migrants were working while abroad. Agriculture now represents a much greater proportion of employment while all other sectors see significant reductions.



Great uncertainty exists in finding employment. Very few migrants expressed very high confidence in finding employment (nine per cent), the majority expressing a lack of confidence (45 per cent) or moderate confidence (46 per cent).



Most migrants do not intend to return to work straight away (57 per cent). The majority of these explained that they needed to rest (71 per cent), with the remainder seeking to spend time with family (27 per cent). Very few expressing any other reasons. On the other hand, 25 per cent expressed that they did intend to return to work straight away while 18 per cent did not know.

A very small number of returning migrants recognised reintegration programs within the quarantine centres. Only one per cent stated that the quarantine centre had some form of program, such as vocational training, financial support or community social event. 18 per cent responded that they did not know and 79 per cent that they did not.

4.4.6 Qualitative results - Border checkpoints

Partnerships and working groups are being used to coordinate the COVID response at the border. The primary actors in these groups are the provincial authority and ministry of health and immigration. The CSOs do not have any current role in assistance but remain ready to support where necessary. They express that the local government is responsible for checking and maintaining the borders that the Lao

returnee migrants can use.

The CSOs report that amnesty has been granted for returning migrants who do not have proper documentation. They consider this as a demonstration that the government is keen for people to use quarantine centres and the proper formal channels, in the context of COVID-19.

4.4.7 Qualitative results - Quarantine centres

Shared spaces between migrants are resulting in infections within the quarantine centres and forcing migrants to stay longer than 14 days. CSOs reported that dormitory style accommodation is being used with living and bathroom spaces being shared by 4-6 people. They consider this to be the result of a lack of space and resources. It is providing an opportunity for COVID-19 infection within the centre. When a person within their room tests positive, the others are asked to stay for a longer period in the centres, to prevent infection spreading in the community.

CSOs are providing critical resources to the quarantine centres for extended stay migrants. One reports that they are delivering PPE, food and other assistance for migrants forced to stay beyond 14 days.

While it is unclear to the extent to which this is occurring, alternative forms of quarantine centres or 'post quarantine' facilities are being identified. These allow returnees to complete farm or field work with adjacent quarantine facilities. This provides the opportunity for migrants to earn an income or upskill while they complete quarantine.

There is major congestion within quarantine centres according to the CSOs. They identify that large numbers of people are currently returning from abroad and that this is requiring the regional governors to identify new quarantine centres regularly.

Vaccination has been identified as the main strategy for managing COVID-19 within the quarantine centres. Johnson and Johnson vaccines are being administered preferentially because they only require one-shot. This service is currently being provided by the WHO. The extent of this program is unclear.

Many CSOs feel as though it's too risky to begin working with returning migrants while in the quarantine centres. COVID-19 infection is considered too great a risk despite this being recognised as an opportunity to disseminate information.

4.4.8 Qualitative results - Trafficking

Many actors and partnerships are active to discuss and address this issue. The CSOs report that the ministry of public security and the Lao Women's Union are working together to "co-share" the issue, while many large international non-government organisations are also working in this space. Other CSOs are forming related working groups with relevant government ministries to support.

Some currently available services are limited in scope. According to CSO reports, there is an available hotline for victims of trafficking but it is not delivering a satisfactory service, with waiting times as long as 45 minutes. Migrant resource centres are also providing counselling services on any trafficking related issues. They feel that COVID-19 implications are reducing migrant ability to access these services.

Furthermore, CSOs report that the number of returning migrants who have been affected by trafficking is increasing.

4.4.9 Qualitative results - Reintegration

The MOLSW are considered to be primary deliverers of employment assistance for returned migrants. While many CSOs have reintegration and reemployment support services and programs, they are finding great difficulty in accessing migrants because of COVID-19 restricting travel. Centralised programs, outreach and services are significantly restricted in their scope. Migrants are not able to travel easily, this is particularly significant for those from regional areas or those who must travel a long distance. Most CSOs follow up with people who have accessed their services to gauge how successfully they have re-integrated into their communities and offer additional support.

4.4.10 Qualitative results - Returning Migrants and re-employment

Most employers do not consider their business to be highly active in employing returning migrants or re-employment of workers who travelled abroad. On the whole, factories are staffed by local workers who tend to remain in their roles, and when they did leave they tend to stay away. There is a certain amount of fear in recruiting returning migrants linked to the travel aspect and the fact they may bring Covid-19 to the factories.

4.5 Re-migration and re-employment including ethical recruitment

4.5.1 Summary and key findings

KEY FINDING 5.1 More than half of returning migrants (51 per cent) did not have any plans to re-migrate and those who did unanimously intend to wait until COVID-19 is less threatening (98 per cent).

Early reports (REFERENCE Oxfam) indicated that more than half of returning migrants were eager to re-migrate and that only 25 per cent had no intention. These results have since been reversed. Less people have plans to remigrate (25 per cent) and those that have plans are indefinitely hesitant (98 per cent). The majority having no plans (51 per cent) and a quarter remaining unsure (25 per cent). It seems that COVID-19 and its new Delta variant is causing renewed concern and unpredictability. Many people valued both the host country government and the Lao government policy in their decision making (up to 55 per cent considered government policy in their decision making). They indicated that they would wait until both governments declare that it is safe to return/go back.

KEY FINDING 5.2 Migrants face diverse and complex challenges to re-migration and most do not know where to seek assistance with these challenges.

COVID-19 infection and high costs were the most widely reported challenges to re-migration. Other significant challenges of note were government regulations and legal processes. But when asked about this legal process the results were very unclear, with a large proportion not understanding. These challenges are not easily solved and require input from a variety of actors. The most common place that migrants seek help would be from Lao authorities, and then from friends/family in the host country.

KEY FINDING 5.3 Two thirds of migrants planning on remigrating will try to back to the same job they had before leaving. Their connections with communities including their employers are critical for addressing remigration challenges.

Nearly three times as many women intended on returning to a different role and similar findings in hospitality could indicate that these roles are less stable or favourable. The majority intended on remaining within their sector of employment. Only 20 per cent of people did not mind or did not know which sector they wanted to return to work in. This is consistent with the greatest challenge being able to find employment, it appears many are satisfied with whichever employment is available. Half of those who intend to return to the same job kept in contact with their employer and nearly all of those have a job offer for when they return. Yet overall, this is about ten per cent of the total number of returning migrants.

4.5.2 Re-migration

Less than half of returning migrants had any plans to re-migrate. Only 25 per cent responded that they planned to re-migrate abroad. A similar number were unsure, expressing that they did not know (23 per cent). While the majority (51 per cent) expressed that they had no plans.

Those who had plans to re-migrate nearly unanimously intend to wait until covid ends (98 per cent). They also cited other timeframes alongside “when covid ends” indicating their personal definition of covid ending. These were, “When my destination’s government says it’s safe to return” (24 per cent), “when the Lao People’s Democratic Republic government says it’s safe to go back” (19 per cent), “at some point in the future when my destination country is safer (has fewer cases of COVID-19)” (13 per cent), “at some point in the future after the border opens” (12 per cent). Other answers represented less than five per cent and included COVID-19 vaccines, and job offers.

For those who intended to re-migrate, contacts with employers and friends and family abroad are the most important contacts. When seeking assistance to re-migrate, 38 per cent of returning migrants stated that they would turn to employers and 34 per cent answered friends and family abroad. A further ten per cent would use an official/licensed recruitment agent, and nine per cent, friends and family in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. A significant proportion stated that they would not seek any help (17 per cent).

Few people knew someone that had already migrated/re-migration abroad. Only seven per cent were confident that they knew someone who had re-migrated. 26 per cent reported that they did not know and 67 per cent did not know anyone. This indicates that the question or the topic of re-migration is

unclear.

Several challenges are anticipated for migrants if they re-migrate abroad. The most common of these is COVID-19 infection (36 per cent), followed by high costs to migrate (26 per cent), and looking for a job (23 per cent). Other answers included government and legal processes (19 per cent), being away from family (12 per cent) and quarantine (nine per cent). These group of challenges represent diverse and complex scenarios for migrant workers seeking to re-migrate, particularly during COVID-19 outbreaks.

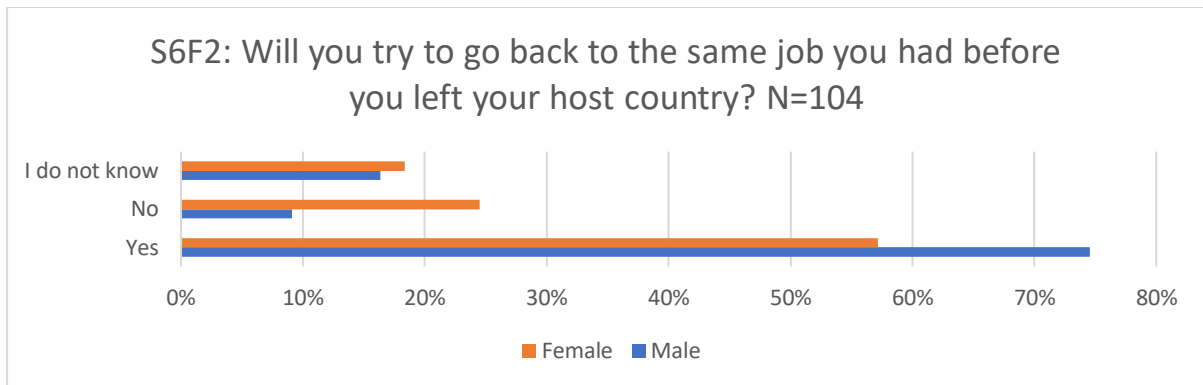


When asked about the difficulty in following legal aspects of their application to migrate abroad, many did not know. 30 per cent of respondents did not know whether they were difficult to follow while 68 per cent said they were not and only two per cent admitted that they were difficult. These results imply a lack of applicability and understanding of the legal processes involved in migration.

Few people knew where to go for assistance with re-migration challenges. 24 per cent reported that they know where to go, five per cent where unsure and 70 per cent did not know. The most common place to seek support was from Lao authorities (22 per cent), followed by friends and family in host country (12 per cent) and then in Lao People's Democratic Republic (ten per cent). Other places included, host country government authorities (eight per cent), recruitment agencies (six per cent), social media groups (five per cent), and an agent/broker (four per cent).

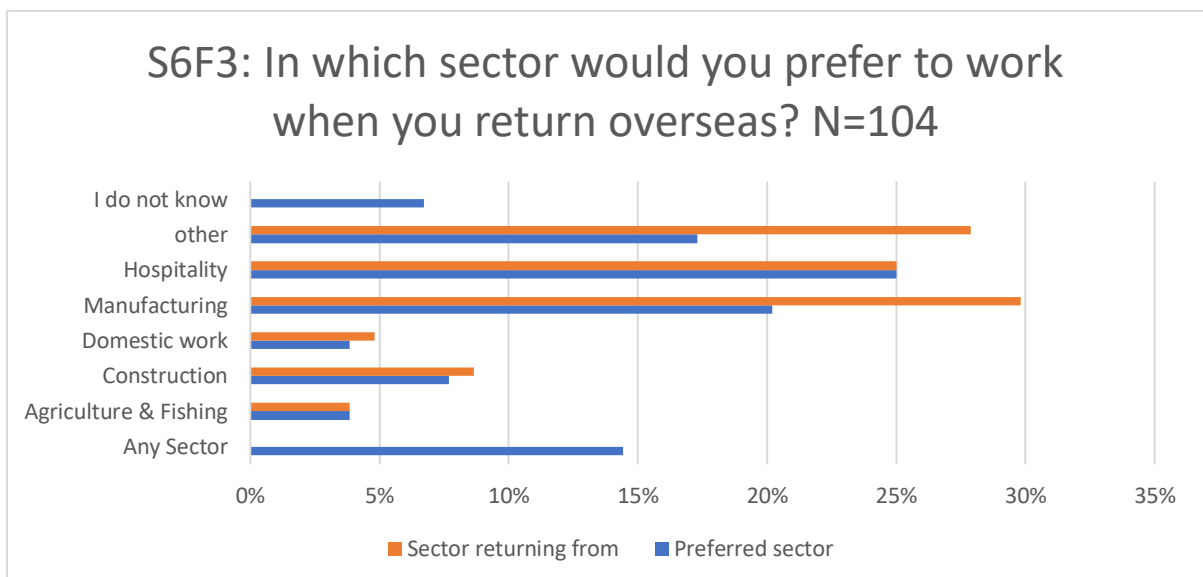
4.5.3 Re-employment

Two thirds of migrants who plan on re-migrating will try to go back to the same job they had before leaving their host country (66 per cent). A minority intended to go to a different role (16 per cent) and similar numbers that they did not know what they would do (17 per cent). This decision had very different responses from men and women migrants. Where only nine per cent of men intended to go to a different role, 24 per cent of women planned on a different role. Similarly, hospitality workers intended on changing roles (27 per cent) indicating that there is less incentive to return for this group of female hospitality workers than the average population.

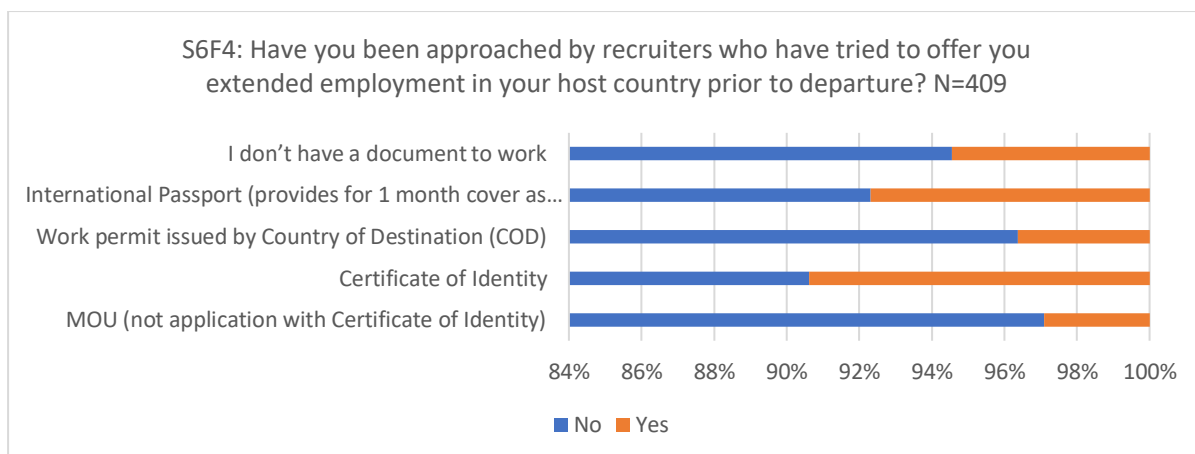


More than half of the migrants thinking of returning to the same company, have maintained a relationship with their employer and most of these have a job offer. 49 per cent are still in contact with their employer, nine per cent are in contact with other staff and four per cent are in contact with both. Of these who are in contact, nearly all have been provided an offer of work if they return (93 per cent). This represents a total of 43 people or approximately ten per cent of the overall sample size.

Working in hospitality and manufacturing are the most highly desired areas of work for those looking to re-migrate. Collecting hospitality/tourism and restaurant into a broader category of hospitality totals 25 per cent of preference. This represents a similar proportion of those who are returning from working in these sectors. In contrast, manufacturing and construction have less interest, suggesting that those returning from working in those sectors have less interest in returning to the same sectors.



Very few returning migrants were approached by recruiters offering extended employment. Only five per cent of the overall sample had this experience but it appears to be slightly higher for those using a certificate of identity as their work documentation. From this small sample, the recruiters offered a diverse range of incentives and/or conditions. Some of these included, increased pay, employers taking responsibility for overstaying permit and the recruiter taking a portion of income. None of these were clearly most common from the sample.



4.5.4 Qualitative results - Re-employment

CSOs are supporting more people with re-employment and related services since COVID-19 began affecting the Lao People's Democratic Republic economy. This is explained by many businesses in Lao People's Democratic Republic being closed and greater competition for employment because migrant workers have returned and are similarly looking for work.

CSOs are convinced that the best way to support migrants is by increasing their skills and making them more employable. Many migrant workers are left with nothing when they return and finding employment is the first step in being able to rebuild their lives. They consider increasing their vocational skills to be the most effective way of achieving this. Despite this, it is recognised that some sectors are more difficult to provide education and training for. Defining skills and qualifications is a challenge for sectors such as hospitality. These challenging sectors tend to align with female dominated industries and place women at greater risk of having skills and education unrecognised.

Certain sectors are overlooked in terms of employment support and assistance. Some CSOs report that the hospitality sector is not very well reached in Lao People's Democratic Republic as an example of less resourced sector. In contrast, agriculture is considered to be a sector of focus with the government working hard to equip people in this regard.

The skills of returning migrants do not match the Lao People's Democratic Republic labour market. Many migrants turn to agriculture because they don't know of any job opportunities in their previous sector of employment and agriculture provides a means for survival.

4.5.5 Qualitative results - Re-migration

CSOs have reduced the support that they give to remigration related activities whilst COVID-19 concern remains. They intend to resume functioning when COVID-19 is no longer a significant concern.

There is a subsection of the migrant community that migrates across the border frequently. It is reported that they migrate between Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand every month. Very little is known about this group of migrants and it is unclear whether they follow COVID-19 guidelines and procedures for migration.

CSOs are divided in their support for re-migration. Some large agencies consider return migration using informal channels without documentation to be a significant risk and that it could lead to re-migration. They

have taken action to distribute related information with the quarantine centres. One CSO assumes a firm stance that people should be made aware of jobs in Lao People's Democratic Republic rather than return to Thailand to work.

4.6 Skills development and training

4.6.1 Summary and key findings

KEY FINDING 6.1 Returning migrants had low levels of education and were most commonly equipped with skills in agriculture prior to migration.

Nearly half of all migrants surveyed had not completed any education beyond primary school and only ten per cent had completed secondary school. It was not clear that particular sectors were utilising higher levels of education in their work. 37 per cent of respondents had skills in agriculture prior to migration but this remained low for other sectors.

KEY FINDING 6.2 59 per cent of migrants did not use their prior skills while abroad. Only construction and agriculture industries utilised the prior skills of migrants.

It was unusual for those working in the other sectors to use their skills. Furthermore, very few migrants engaged in additional training before migrating to make themselves more employable. It appears that more than half of the jobs in these industries (excluding agriculture and migration) do not require specific skills or experience.

KEY FINDING 6.3 Stark contrast exists between perceived sectors of demand in Lao and countries abroad.

Migrants consider the job market in Lao to be more focused on agriculture than nearby countries of migration, and lower in demand across all other sectors. Most notable lack of demand were sectors of hospitality and manufacturing. It infers that many of those who return with skills in these areas will look to work in different sectors.

KEY FINDING 6.4 Only four per cent of respondents participated in skills or vocational training.

These migrants were motivated by the desire to learn new skills and access better opportunities. Employers and recruiters were the primary providers of these trainings. Moreover, only 18 per cent of those who completed such training were provided with a certificate of completion. These results infer that such training was used to prepare people for specific job opportunities within a company rather than particular roles in a sector. It appears that this form of vocational training is very infrequent despite several CSOs

working in this space.

KEY FINDING 6.5 Migrants were largely unaware of skills trainings. Nearly three quarters of returning migrants stated that they had not participated in such training because they were not aware of any.

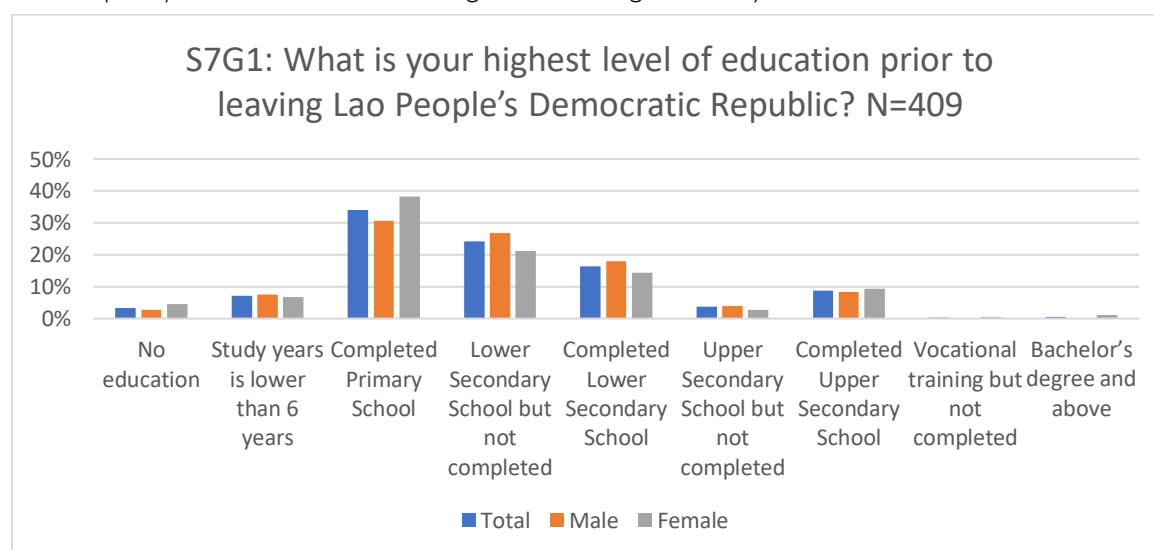
Skills and vocational trainings are not widely known amongst the migrant community. More than 80 per cent of women reported that they were not aware, this is 10 per cent more than men and indicates that the majority of vocational training could be more commonly tailored to male dominated industries. Despite only eight per cent of respondents citing that they could not afford skills training, 81 percent stated that they would be more willing to upskill if training was subsidised. It seems cost is an important factor in most decision making, even if not the primary factor.

KEY FINDING 6.6 Manufacturing, agriculture and hospitality sectors had high levels of interest for vocational/skills training.

Less than half the respondents were interested in construction, textile/garment and self-employment industries, while less than a third were interested in domestic work. For all sectors the primary reasons for interest were desire for “new skills” and “better opportunities”. Reasons for disinterest vary with each sector. There was considerable interest in vocational skills and training overall. With promising opportunities for training that teaches skills and provides a pathway to better opportunities.

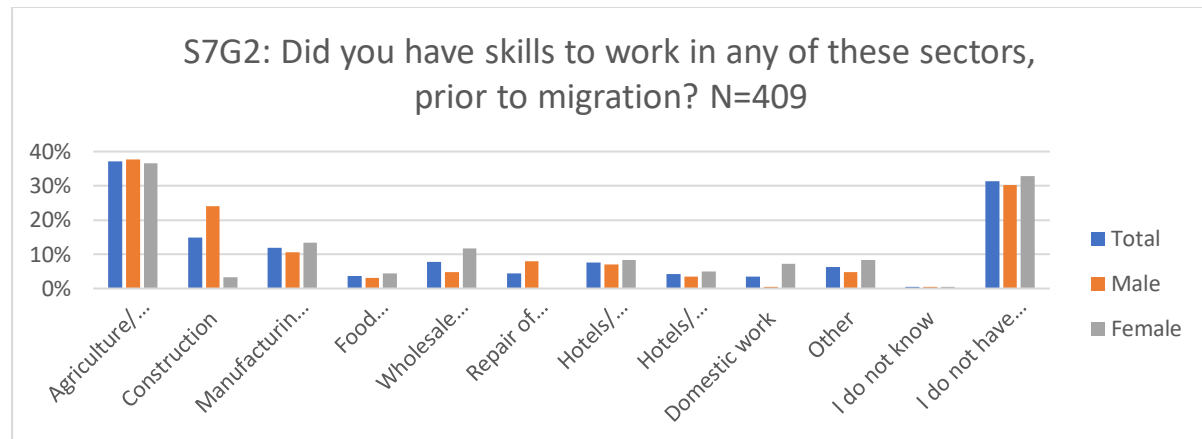
4.6.2 Education

Returning migrant workers had low levels of education. 44 per cent did not have any education beyond primary school and only ten per cent have completed secondary school. The most highly educated sector was hospitality which doubled the average rate finishing secondary school.

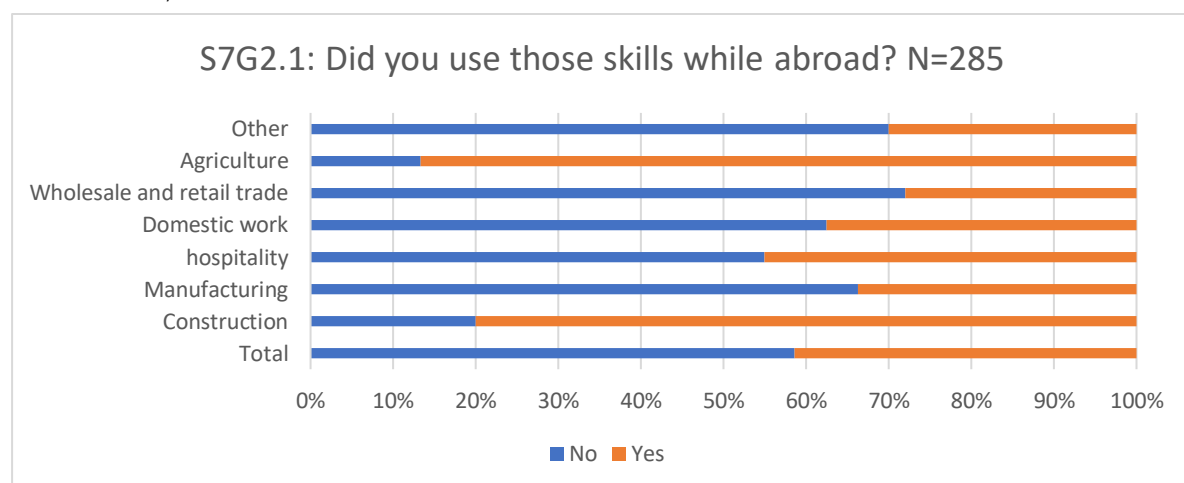


4.6.3 Prior skills

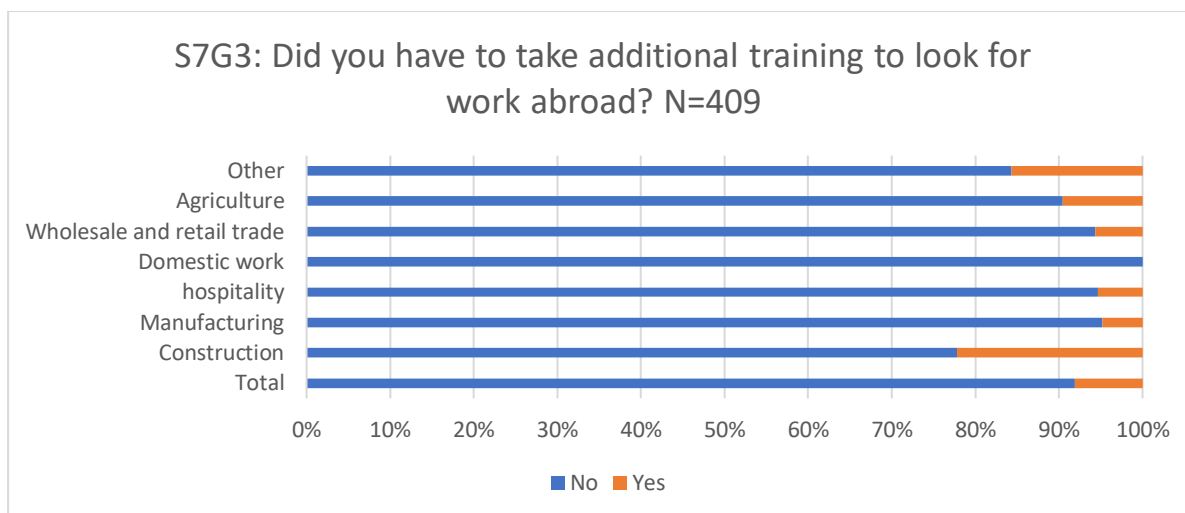
Nearly a third of migrants did not have skills in common sectors of work prior to migration. Agriculture was the most highly reported area of skills (37 per cent). Most other sectors recorded a gendered difference in responses.



The majority of migrants did not use their skills while they were abroad. 59 per cent of migrants reported that their prior skills were not used. Agriculture and construction sectors are significantly more likely to be used compared with the other sectors. Since a small sample from these two sectors answered this question, it remains only valuable as a broad indicator.

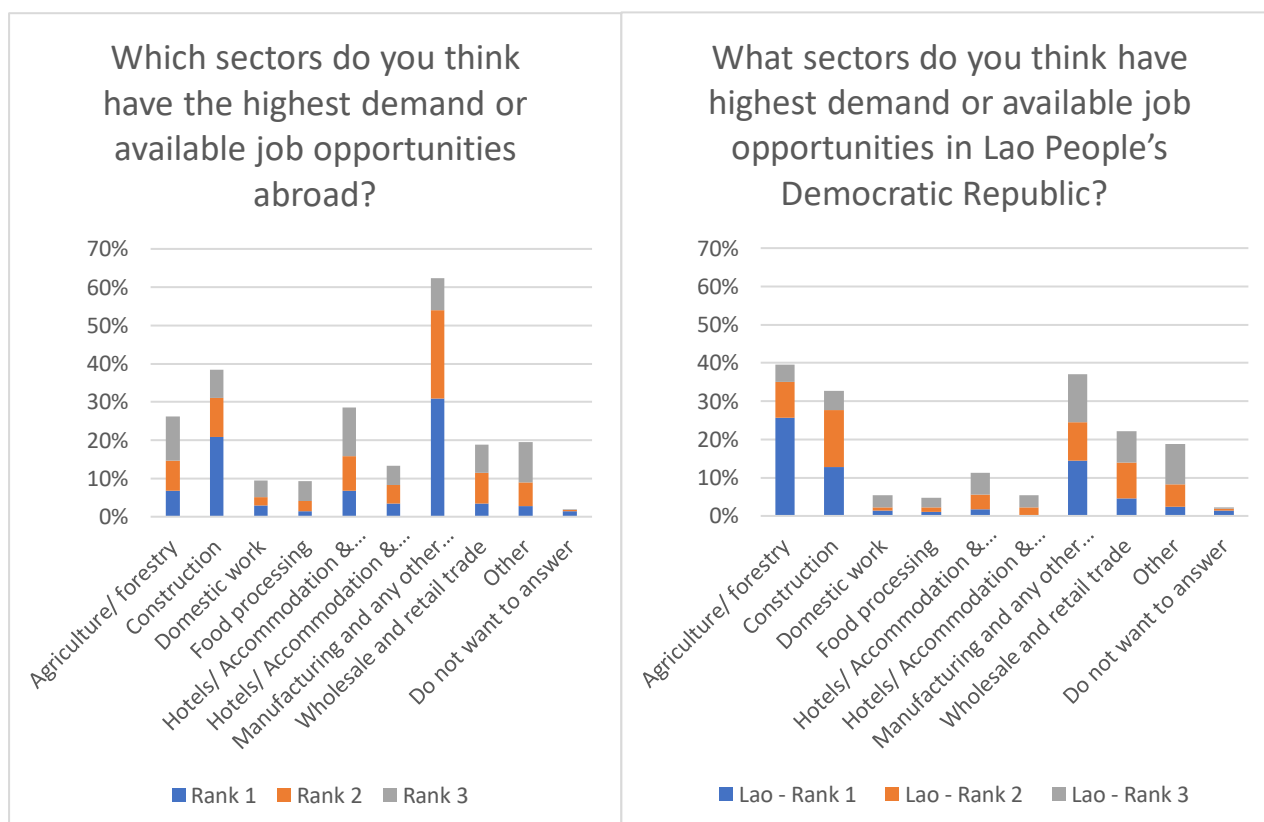


A small number of migrants reported having to undertake skills training before working abroad (eight per cent). Similarly, construction and agriculture stand as outliers.



4.6.4 Sectors of demand

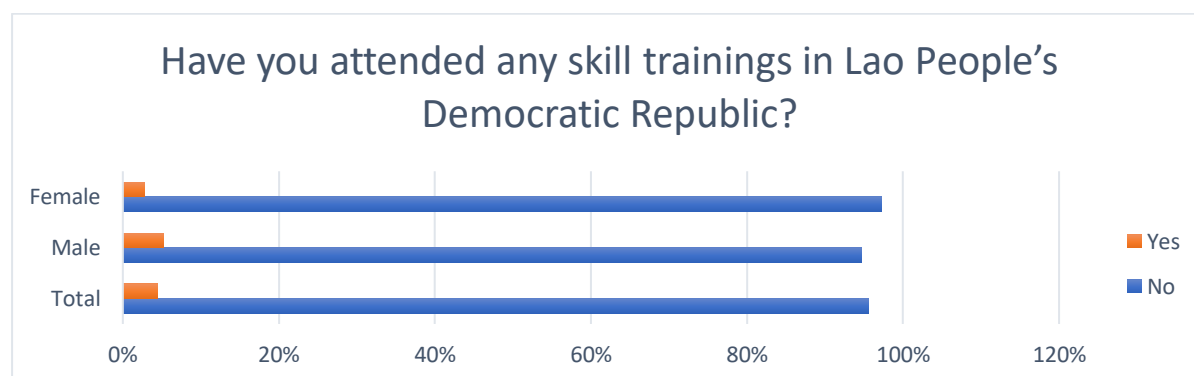
Migrants consider manufacturing and construction industries to be the sectors of greatest demand. Just over half of all migrants ranked either of these sectors as highest. Agriculture and hospitality represent the next highest demand sectors. In contrast, agriculture and forestry is ranked as the most in demand sector in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Manufacturing and hospitality sectors have much less significant demand in Lao People's Democratic Republic than perceived demand abroad.



4.6.5 Skills/vocational training

The vast majority of migrant workers did not attend any skill trainings in Lao People's Democratic Republic. There were slight differences between men and women, with women attending less. Employers (39 per

cent) and recruiters (33 per cent) are most common providers of skills training, with the Lao People's Democratic Republic government responsible for a minority (11 per cent). While the sample size for this response is very small, it gives some initial insight into the most common providers of skills training.

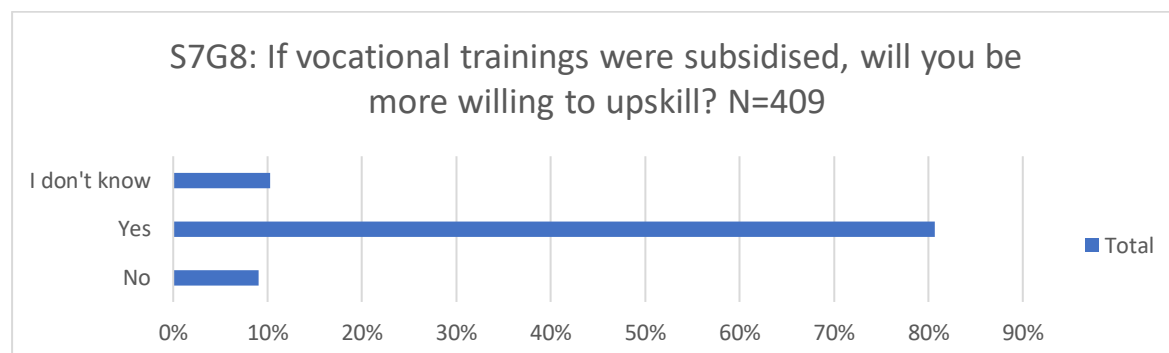


New skills and better opportunities were the most common reasons for participating in vocation training. 60 to 70 per cent of respondents highlighting these reasons for attending. A smaller number reported that their motivation stemmed from interest (17 per cent) or increased earning potential (22 per cent). This is confirmed by less than 40 per cent being aware of how much they could earn from the jobs that their training prepared them for. There is little indication that skills training directly correlates with earning potential from the migrant worker experience. Further findings indicate that recognition of learning is slim or delivered in alternative ways. From this sample, only 18 per cent received a certificate of completion after finishing their training. Very few received training in entrepreneurship and none received any initial business support.

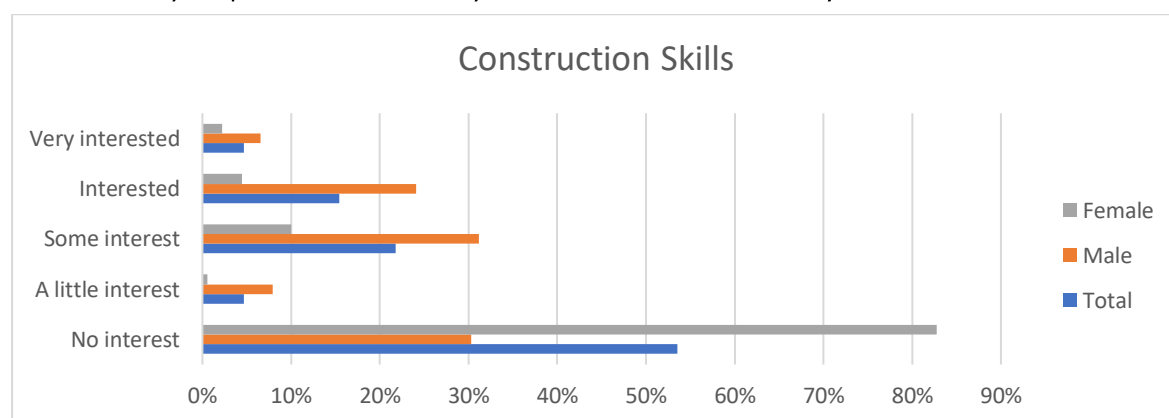
The majority of migrants are not aware of any skills/vocational training opportunities. 74 per cent of returning migrants cited the fact that they were unaware as the reason they did not complete any vocational or skills training. The next two most common answers were that they did not have time outside of work (ten per cent) and that they could not afford it (eight per cent)



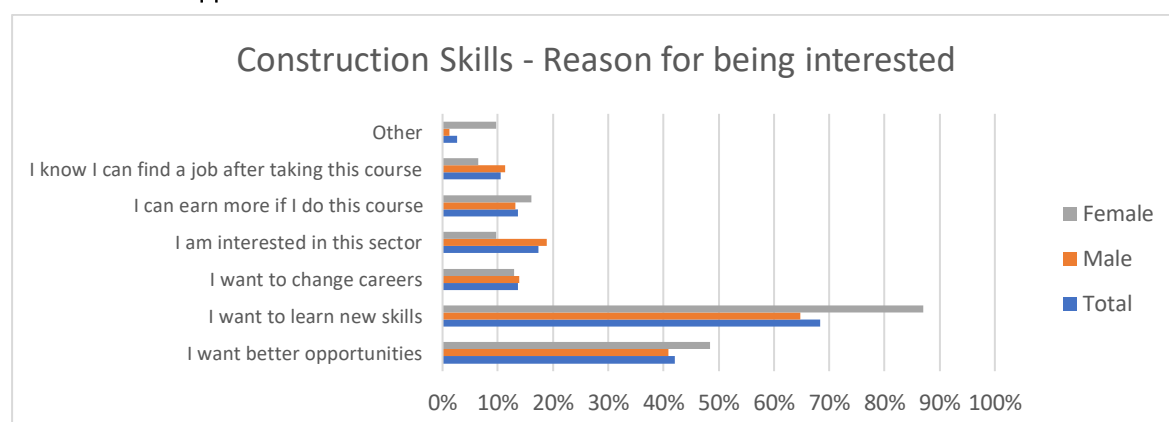
The vast majority would be more inclined to upskill if trainings were subsidised. While it remains vague to what degree subsidies would impact enrolments, it is clear that cost is major factor in making decisions about vocational training.



More than half of migrants (54 per cent) reported that they were not interest in acquiring construction skills while only 20 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.

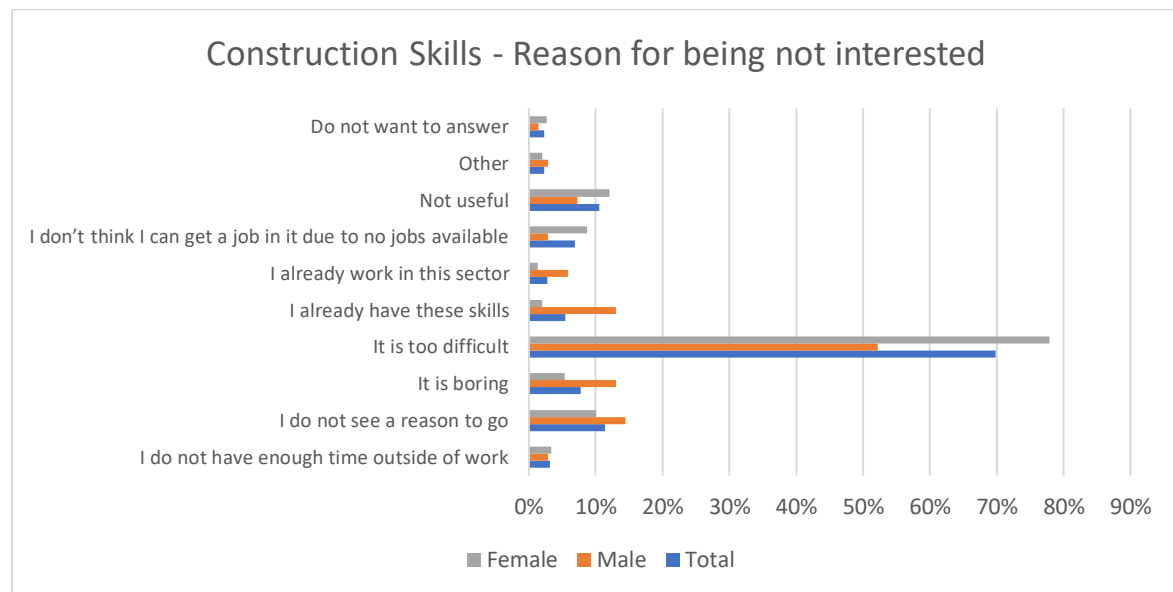


Of those migrants who were interested (46 per cent), 68 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 42 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities.

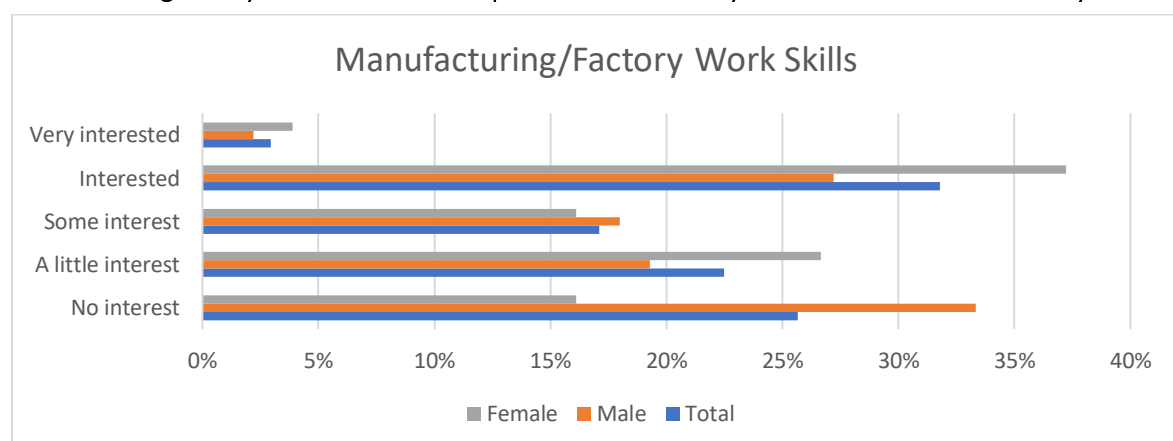


Of those migrants who were not interested, 70 per cent reported that they were not interested because they found the construction skills to be too difficult while 22 per cent said that they were not interested because either the skills were not useful for them, or they did not see any reason to acquire these skills.

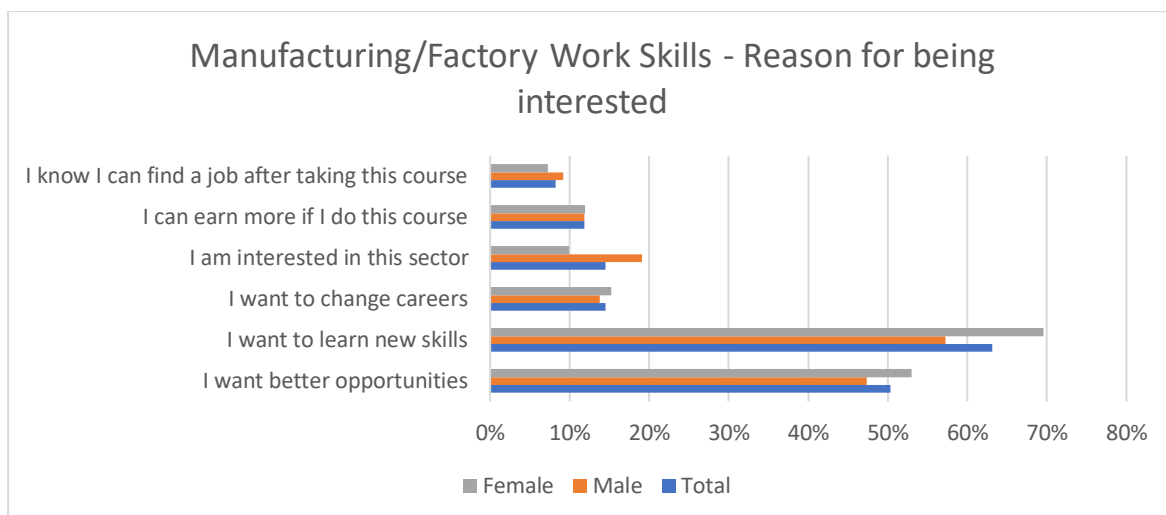
Whereas eight per cent said that either they already had these skills or were already working in the construction sector.



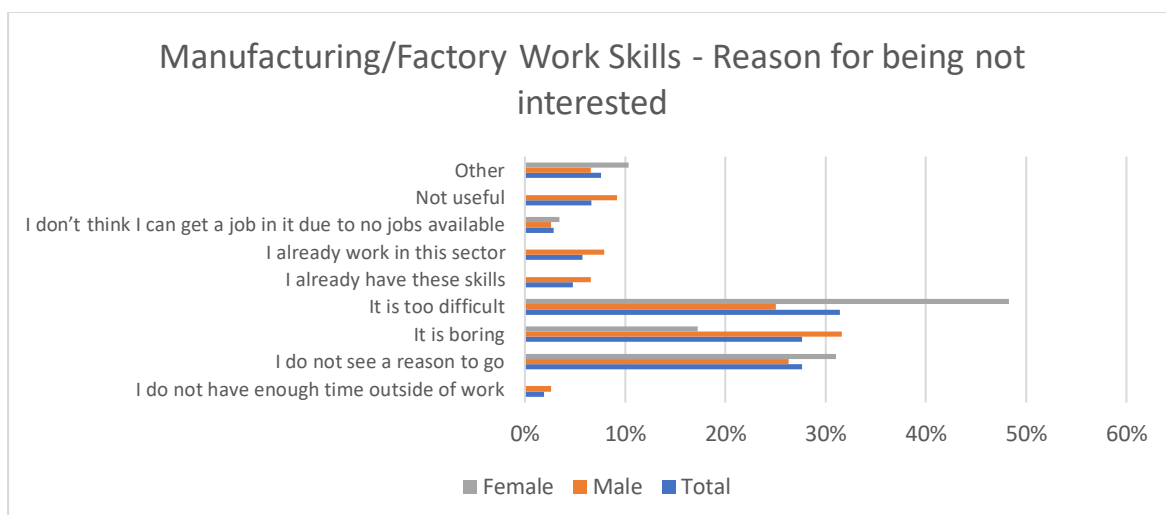
Around one fourth of migrants (26 per cent) reported that they were not interest in acquiring manufacturing/factory work skills while 35 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.



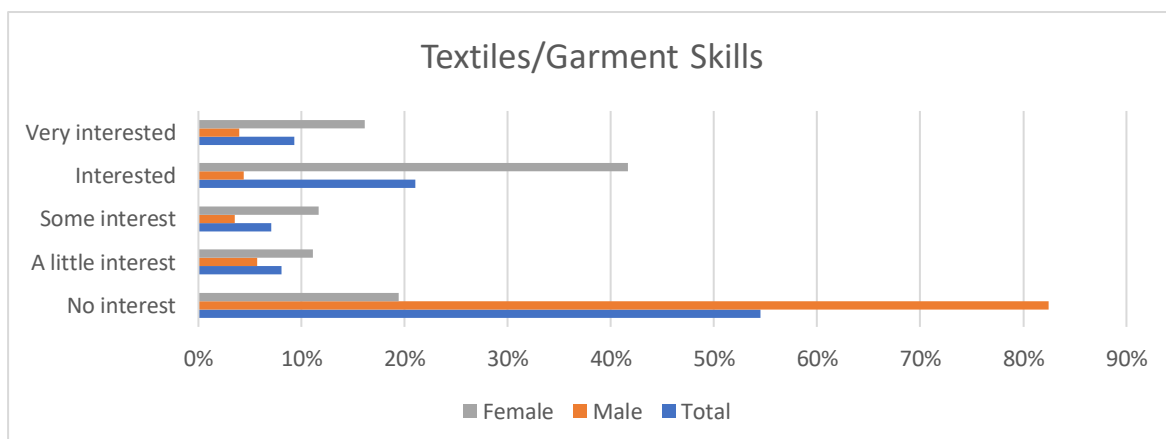
Of those migrants who were interested (74 per cent), 63 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 50 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities.



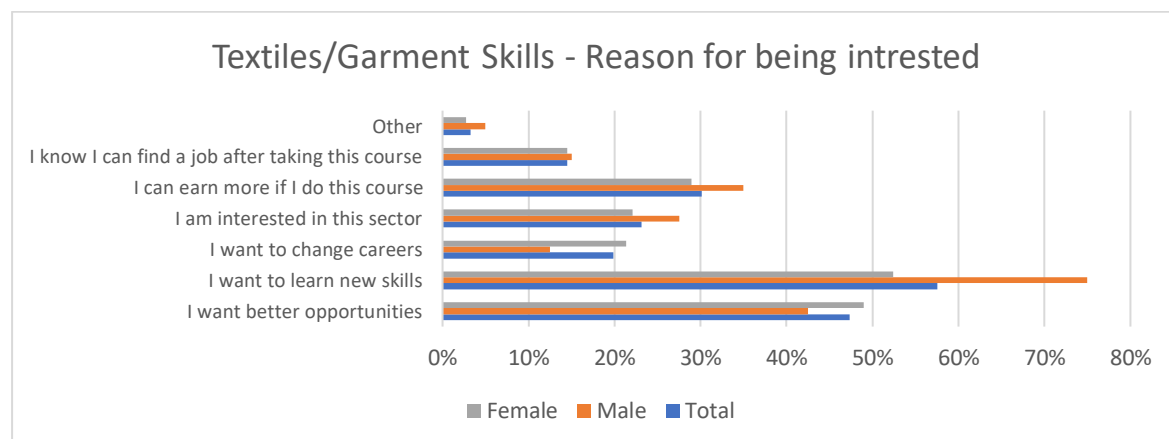
Of those migrants who were not interested, 31 per cent reported that they were not interested because they found the manufacturing/factory work skills to be too difficult while 56 per cent said that they were not interested because either they find the skills to be boring or they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. Whereas 11 per cent said that either they already had these skills or were already working in the manufacturing/factory work sector.



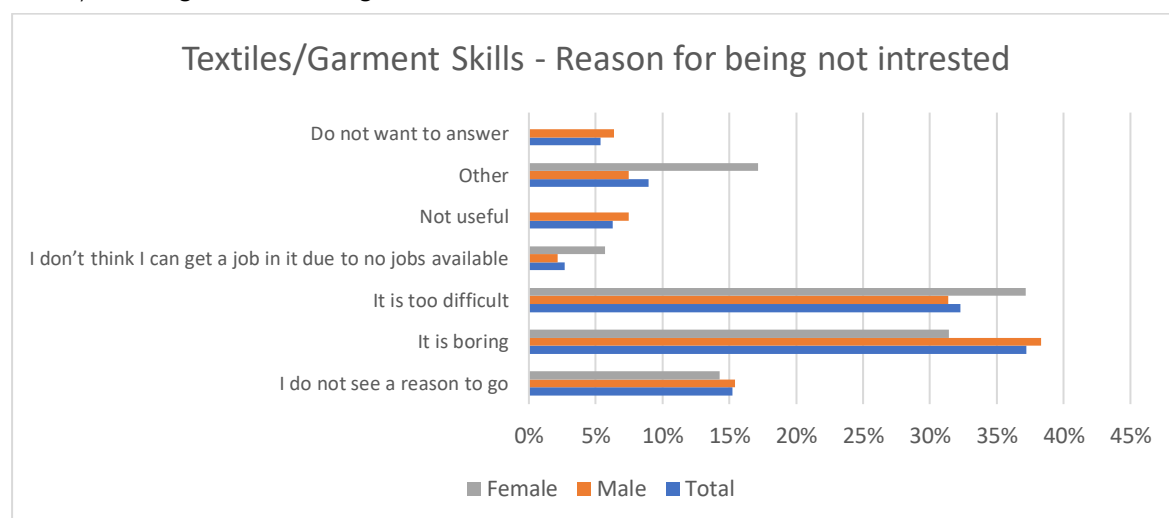
More than half of migrants (55 per cent) reported that they were not interest in acquiring textiles/garment skills while 30 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.



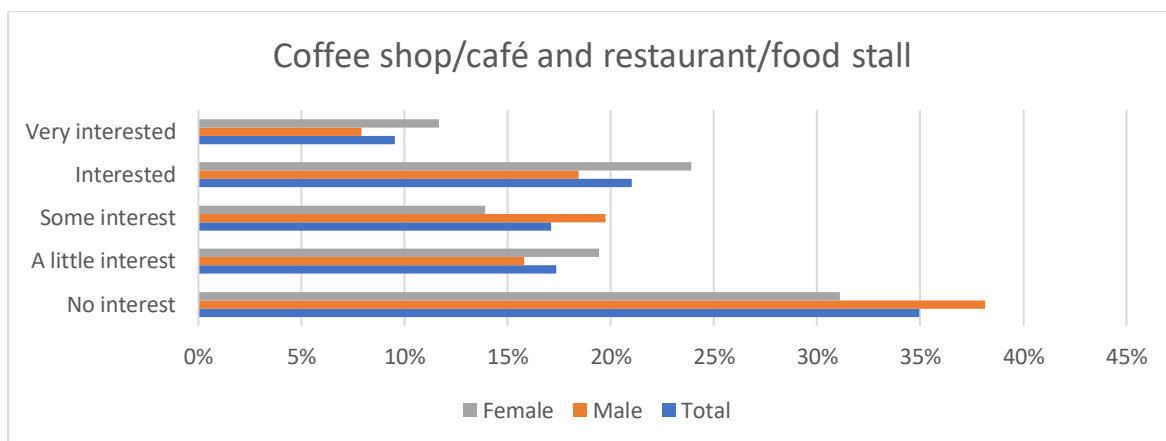
Of those migrants who were interested (45 per cent), 58 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 47 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities. Whereas 30 per cent said that they could earn more if they acquire these skills.



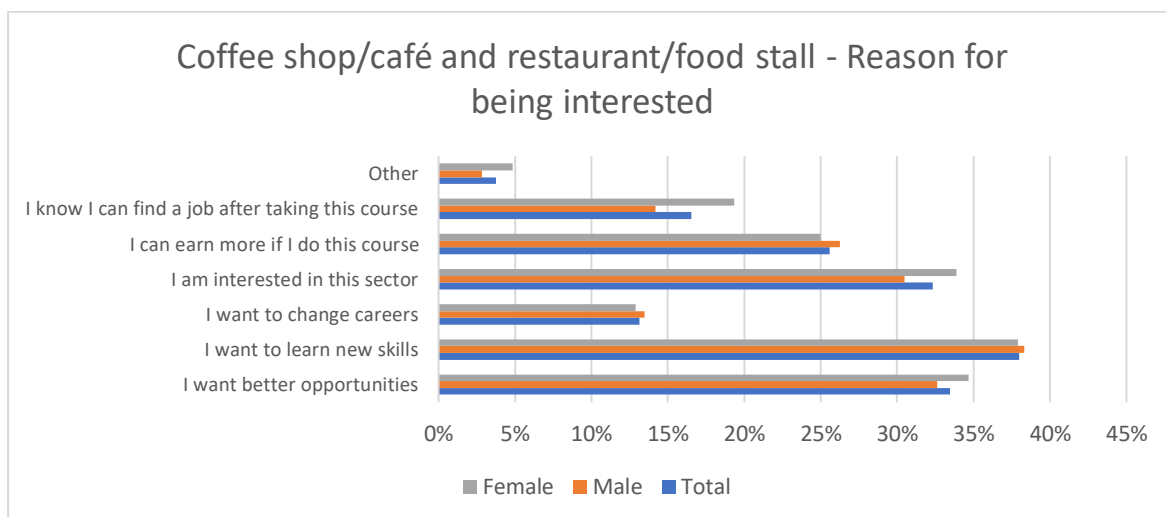
Of those migrants who were not interested, 37 per cent reported that they were not interested because they found the textiles/garment skills to be boring while 37 per cent said that they were not interested because they find the skills to be too difficult. Whereas 15 per cent said they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. On the other hand, three per cent said that either they already had these skills or were already working in the textiles/garment sector.



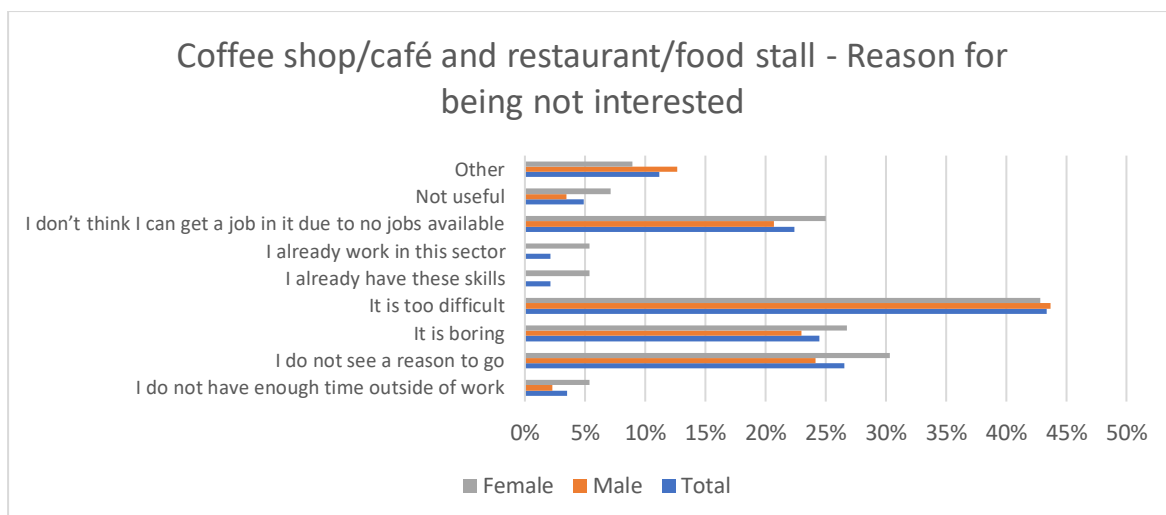
35 per cent of migrants reported that they were not interest in acquiring coffee shop/café and restaurant/food stall skills while 31 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.



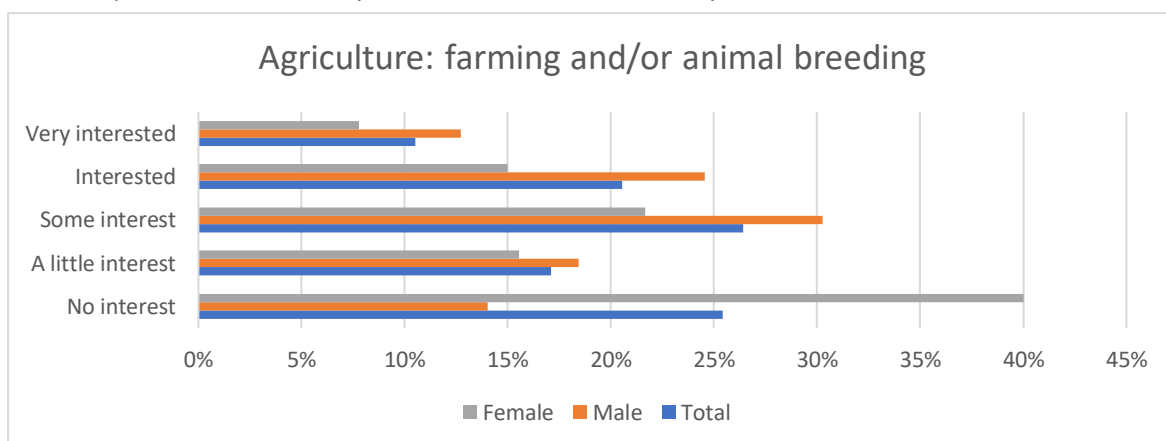
Of those migrants who were interested (65 per cent), 38 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 33 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities. Whereas 32 per cent said that they were really interested in this sector.



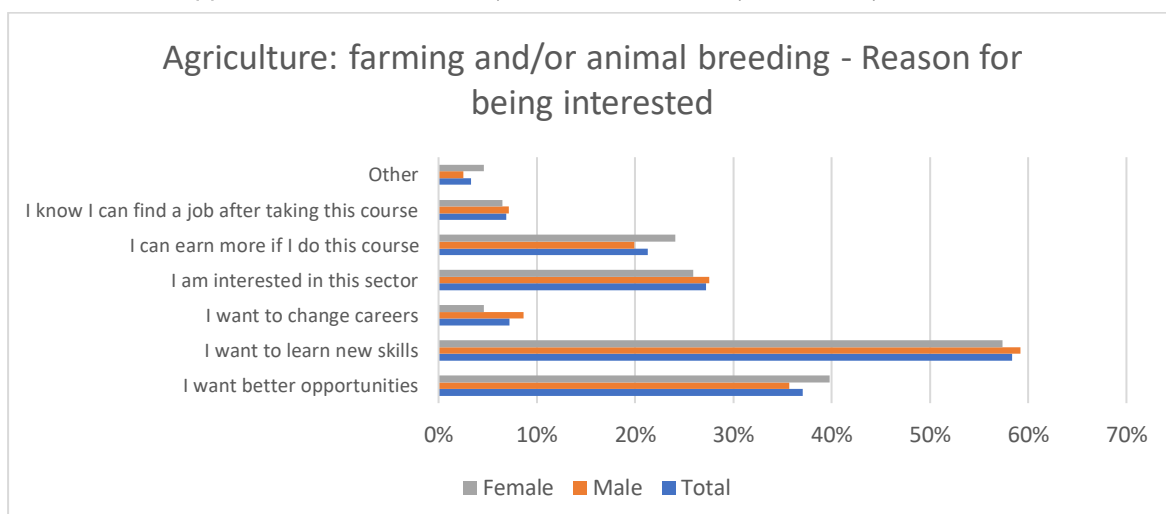
Of those migrants who were not interested, 43 per cent reported that they were not interested because they found the coffee shop/café and restaurant/food stall skills to be too difficult while 27 per cent said that they were not interested because they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. Whereas 24 per cent said they find these skills to be boring. On the other hand, four per cent said that either they already had these skills or were already working in the coffee shop/café and restaurant/food stall sector.



One fourth of migrants (25 per cent) reported that they were not interest in acquiring agriculture skills while 31 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.



Of those migrants who were interested (75 per cent), 58 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 37 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities. Whereas 27 per cent said that they were really interested in this sector.

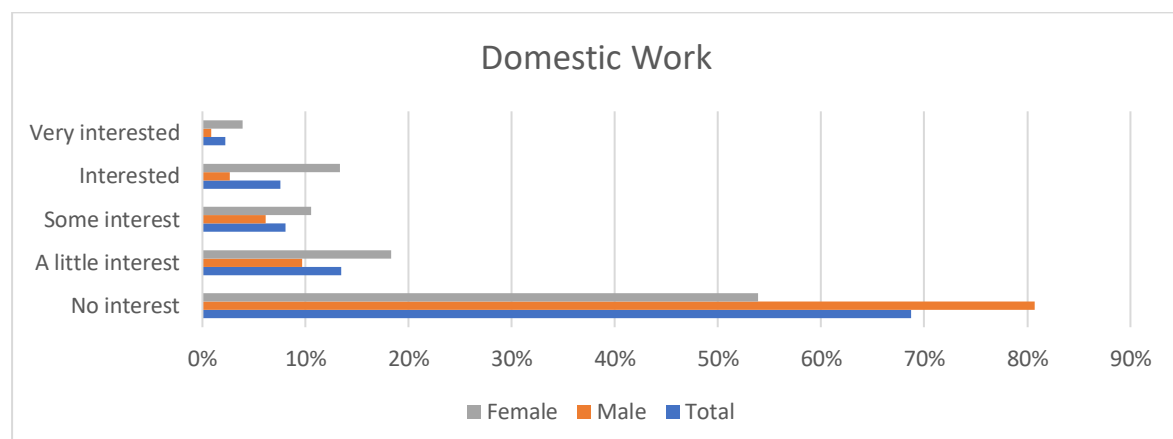


Of those migrants who were not interested, 33 per cent reported that they were not interested because they already had the agriculture skills while 24 per cent reported that they were not interested because

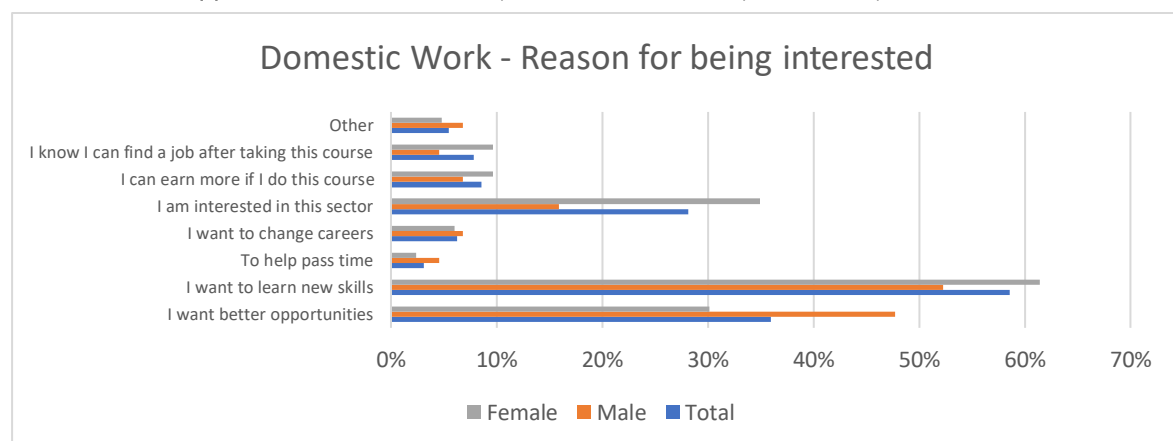
they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. Whereas 18 per cent said they find these skills to be boring. On the other hand, seven per cent said that they were already working in the agriculture sector.



Close to three fourth of migrants (69 per cent) reported that they were not interest in acquiring domestic work skills while only ten per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.

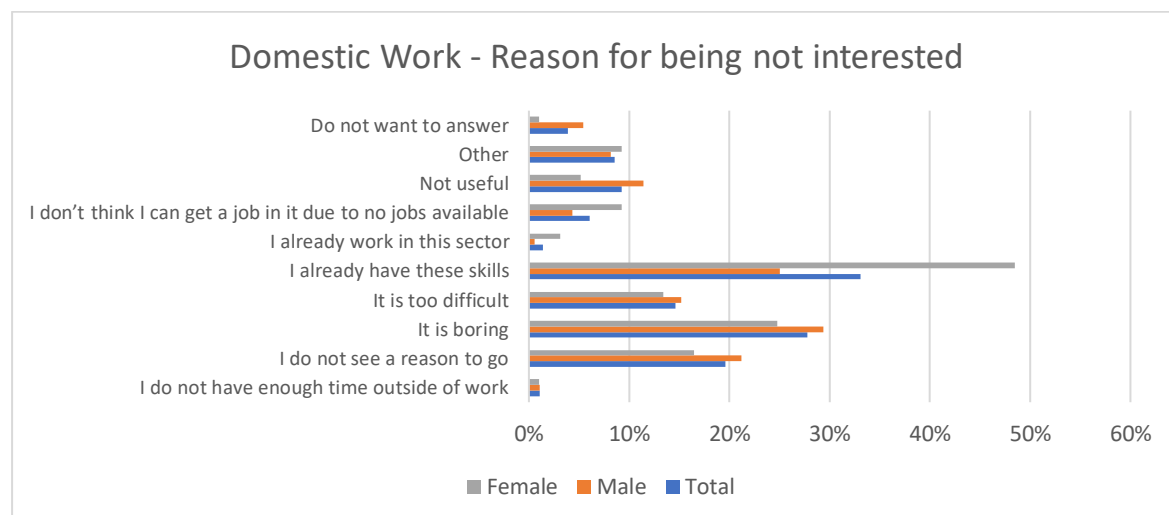


Of those migrants who were interested (31 per cent), 59 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 36 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities. Whereas 28 per cent said that they were really interested in this sector.

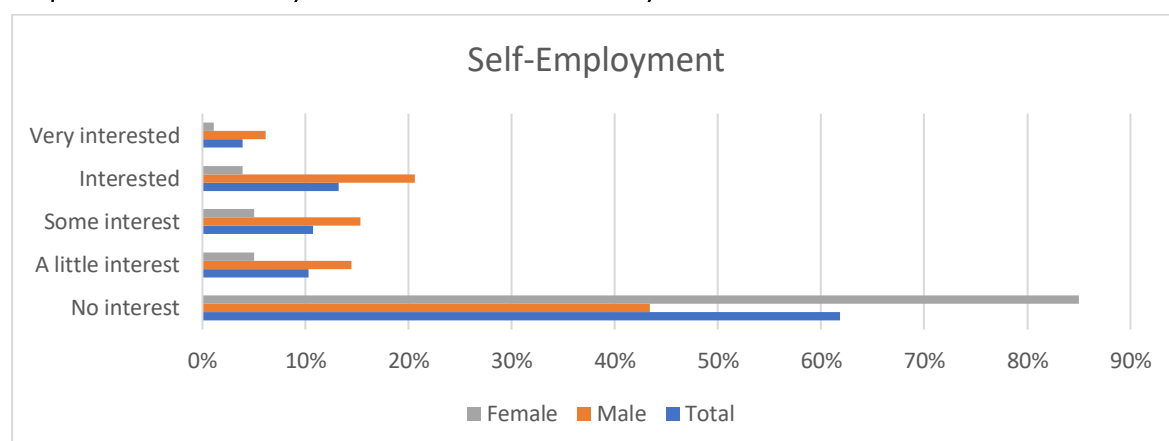


Of those migrants who were not interested, 33 per cent reported that they were not interested because

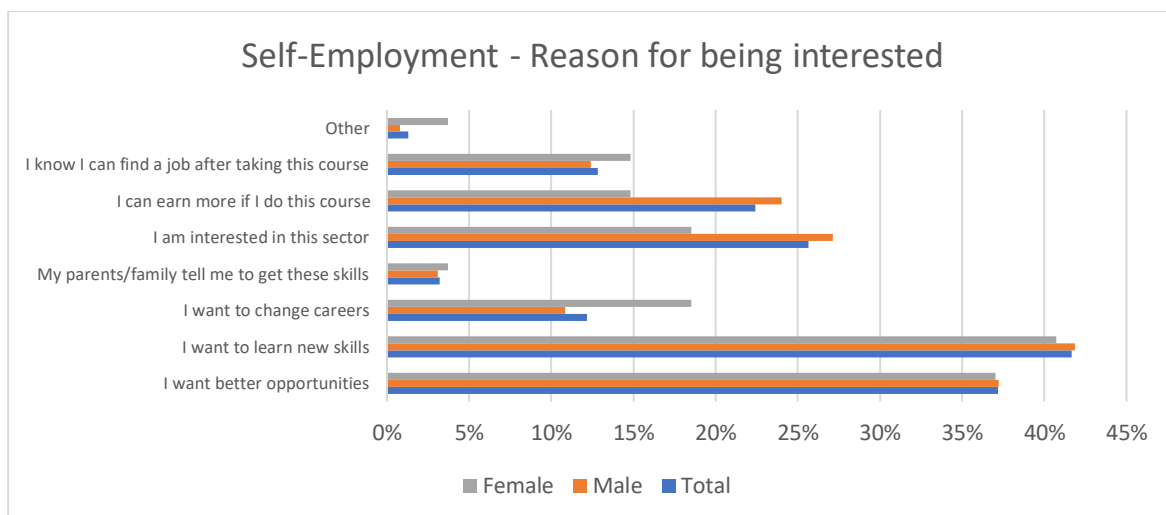
they already had the domestic work skills while 28 per cent said that they were not interested because they find the skills to be boring. Whereas 20 per cent said they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. On the other hand, two per cent said that either they did not have enough time outside work or were already working in the domestic work sector.



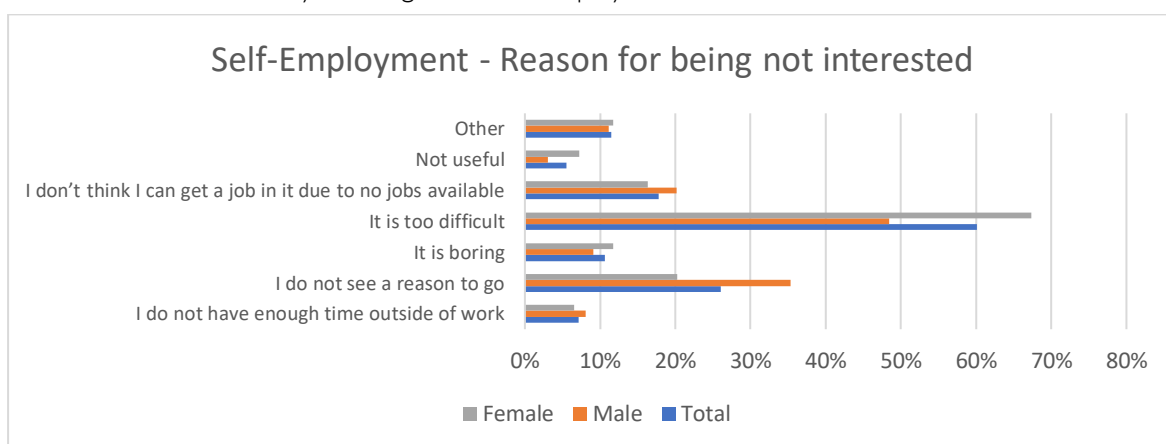
62 per cent of migrants reported that they were not interest in acquiring self-employment skills while only 17 per cent said that they were either interested or very interested.



Of those migrants who were interested (38 per cent), 42 per cent reported that they were interested because they wanted to learn new skills while 37 per cent said that they were interested because they wanted better opportunities. Whereas 26 per cent said that they were really interested in this sector.



Of those migrants who were not interested, 60 per cent reported that they were not interested because they found the textiles/garment skills to be too difficult while 26 per cent said that they were not interested because they did not see any reason to acquire these skills. Whereas none said that either they already had these skills or were already working in the self-employment sector.



4.6.6 Qualitative results - Partnerships for vocational training

CSOs usually work in partnership to provide vocational training. Some CSOs involve local businesses to develop vocational training centres or simply guarantee a job at the completion of a vocational training program. Others involve public institutions such as the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union and Lao government union. CSOs see great potential in future partnerships for vocational training.

4.6.7 Qualitative results - Vocational training – balancing stakeholder interests

It is commonplace that vocational training delivered by CSOs considers gender inequality and the unique challenges that women migrants face. Some vocational training programs integrate learning about gender-based violence and support services within the overall structure. Other programs are more closely tailored toward women dominated industries such as sewing and beauty. Women are the main beneficiaries of CSO vocational training programs, possibly as a result of low skills recognition in women dominated industries.

CSOs report that many migrants are trying to get vocational training but many are not able. This is primarily as a result of COVID related challenges.

Different areas of training can provide different outcomes in terms of migration and remigration patterns. CSOs recognise that certain skillsets will restrict returning migrant workers to work that is only found within cities and not available in their home towns. This means that they are less likely to return home long term and more likely to remigrate. Skills in entrepreneurial areas such as sewing are much more valuable because they are transferrable into a wide variety of areas, enabling migrants to use them wherever they live. In contrast, skills in food production or industry will limit migrants' ability to use these skills in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

There is debate within communities about job opportunities for locals and those considered returning migrants. The government is helping negotiate between the two parties by distributing services and jobs fairly.

Many migrants see little value in skills training that equips them for jobs in Lao People's Democratic Republic because salaries are considered too low. It is believed that investing in training for jobs that pay between 1.1 million and 1.5 million kip is not justifiable. This could be related to the current structure of vocational training programs that usually take three months to complete. This is particularly prevalent for women who are not able to make a living wage.

Returning migrants face many severe challenges and consider a low priority. In the context of more prevalent human trafficking, COVID-19 infection, total lack of employment, and other pressing concerns. Migrants consider upskilling to be low priority.

4.6.8 Qualitative results - Recognition of skills

CSOs report mixed concern over the recognition of skills. Some report that it does not represent a large issue and does not impact their areas of operation. Other CSOs report that there are several structural concerns that prevent the proper recognition of skills. The primary example of this is that some employers immediately exclude job seekers because they have not attained a certain level of secondary school completion (either 9 or 12). This is excluding those who may be otherwise skilled for the role. These CSOs factor this into their vocational training programs and support them to attain year 9 of schooling.

There is low skill recognition in women dominated industries. In many women dominated industries such as hospitality, it is considered difficult to assess and recognise skillsets. This has resulted in higher numbers of women seeking vocational training from CSOs.

4.6.9 Qualitative results - Skills shortages

Domestic work is not an area of skill shortage in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Many migrant workers work in this sector while abroad but struggle to find similar employment in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Domestic work is generally considered unnecessary in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Agriculture is an area of significant skill shortage. As many returning migrants returning to their home towns, many move into agriculture as a means of survival. They continue traditional farming practices. CSOs identify

an opportunity to upskill these workers and create greater economic returns.

Some CSOs highlight that there are skill shortages in every sector. This could indicate that while there are large numbers of people seeking employment, there are small numbers of highly skilled workers across the board.

There is no formal method of identifying skills shortages. Many CSOs work at the local level to support individuals to upskill and find employment but lack coordination from a national method.

4.6.10 Qualitative results - Skills development

New recruits in the companies will often be required to sit a test to determine their skills level by the new employer. Results of the test determines their level of placement within the company. Different companies require different skills such as being able to drive, read, write, sew. The companies all recruit low skilled workers and while a basic skills level is expected, initial training is provided by the employer to bring new employees up to standard. One company reported that all new recruits would be sent for 40 hours mandatory training at an external training centre.

Employers are willing to invest in training new staff and internal career progression programmes with further training. Investing in these internal training programmes seems to be universal amongst the employer sample, however there is little or no certification provided for this training. Certification that is provided tends to be mostly from external training programmes.

None of the respondents were aware of any employees who may have undertaken government vocational training. Some were able to name a third party training centre where recruits had received certified training prior to starting with the factory. It was noted these recruits had higher skill levels than other new recruits.

5

CONCLUSION

6

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Debt and remittances

- **Reduce the cost of initial migration.** Currently, costs remain very high, averaging between 5,000 and 10,000 THB with some as high as 25,000 THB. As described under employment documentation, reducing initial migration costs may require simplification of documentation procedures. In addition to this, further research is required into the costs that migrant workers incur as part of this initial journey to allow for more targeted intervention. This will reduce the need for migrant workers to enter into debt for the purpose of migration.
- **Include debt education in pre-departure training.** Nearly a third of migrants enter into debt to pay for their initial migration and a significant number for their return migration. Furthermore, it seems that COVID related job/income losses pushed even more migrants into debt. Many of these

borrow from friends and family and a significant number do not repay their debts within the first three months. This leaves both migrants and their friends and families in a state of vulnerability, with flow on effects for their communities. It is important to include debt education in pre-departure training for migrant workers. This education needs to include, safe places to take out loans from, repayment planning and the risks of borrowing from friends and family.

- **Provide remittance service education in pre-departure training.** This needs to increase the understanding of remittance sending and receiving methods among migrant workers and their families. Both parties need a fundamental understanding of available remittance methods so that they are able to maximise the impact of their remittances. While very few had problems with their sending methods it is clear that they were not utilising the most effective ways of sending. Moreover, high levels of concern were reported that the remittances sent home weren't enough for their families. There are several challenges that are likely to prevent migrant workers using the cheapest services. Both migrants and their families may lack bank accounts in their respective countries. Migrants may be limited by documentation or cost from accessing banking services. This could be resolved by regularising a higher proportion of migrants. Migrant families may be limited by a lack of financial literacy or accessible services. By increasing understanding of remittance sending and receiving methods they may be able to overcome these barriers. Knowledge of various new fintech money transfer companies (utilising mobile wallets for example) will provide greater flexibility to migrant workers and result in more money reaching their families. Education and training need to be practical and provided early enough that migrants have the opportunity to discuss and establish remittance channels that suit their families' needs.

6.2 Employment and employment protection

- **Government coordinated work abroad workshops at a local level across Lao People's Democratic Republic.** Migrant workers are travelling abroad often with skills they have learnt in Lao People's Democratic Republic, 51% of respondents said they worked in the same industry before going abroad. Workers are looking for work where the pay is good, but are also attracted to work that is easy to apply for. The informality of migrant workers finding work placements abroad through friends and family networks and not through formal channels restricts the workers' options. Using networks outside of friends and family could assist workers in finding alternative work places which may be better suited to them.

Government coordinated workshops could be used to inform communities of different options for working abroad. This could include the type of work available in a variety of industries and an introduction to relevant, approved employment channels for interested individuals to access these positions abroad.

- **Coordinated pre-departure training to support workers before working abroad.** Most workers working in Thailand confirmed that they had some form of visa for their employment. Despite the higher costs, almost 50 per cent of migrant workers are using the MoU as they understand it provides them with a certain degree of protection. However whilst this provides some protection, most workers would not know where to seek advice when facing difficult situations, including understanding if they are covered for sick pay if they fall ill.

Prior to taking up the MoU, most workers must undertake pre-departure training. This is sometimes cited as causing delays to the MoU process. Coordinated training prior to departure at a convenient time can ensure that workers receive guidance on crucial information regarding worker protections, and further support including financial guidance in terms of remittances, access to and how to register for bank accounts, and further information on how to keep in touch with family at home whilst working abroad. The SaverAsia⁹ app and website can be leveraged to provide an online resource, at low cost, to assist with pre-departure training¹⁰.

- **Provide education to migrant workers about the travel document application process and reduce travel documentation costs.** Earlier guidance to assist migrant workers in the travel document application process, the choices available, along with the protections offered would be beneficial to the workers and help them make an informed choice in case they need to use these. Despite the high cost of the MoU, workers are prepared to pay for documentation that offers them good protection. They also need to know how to access help when they need it. Some workers find themselves excluded from the MoU process due to its high cost, resulting in many travelling undocumented.
- **Speed up the processing of worker documentation.** While many workers reported their employer was helpful in processing their visa applications, a significant number of workers said they were not supportive. Qualitative interviews with CSOs also suggested an MoU application could take up a year to process.

6.2.1 Recruitment

- **Employment vacancy advertising in quarantine centres.** Despite the impact of Covid-19, all employers interviewed continue to recruit to some degree and do not foresee a reduction in future capacity. Most employers hold a positive view of advertising for vacancies in quarantine

⁹ www.saverasia.com

¹⁰ SaverAsia will be providing pre-departure training for workers in Cambodia, prior to departure for countries including Thailand and Malaysia. Content can be adapted for Lao workers.

centres. Some employers interviewed, recognised that returning migrants often come with a higher skill set than local workers and this could provide a benefit to their company. Since the factories focus heavily on their current worker pool for recruiting new staff, recruiting staff with wider skills and experience could benefit the whole work force. Providing information to employers to encourage advertising in the quarantine centres could help link the returning migrants directly to companies within Lao People's Democratic Republic operating in the industries they are skilled in.

- **Covid-19 safety protocols as part of the safe recruitment process.** Working with employers to set up a safe recruitment process to ensure Covid-19 protocols are observed. Deploying a scheme based at and around the quarantine centres could help returning migrants to find work quickly, perhaps as soon as they have completed their quarantine.
- **Maintain a database of returning migrants and provide information about this labour pool to employers.** Employers would welcome access to a database of returning migrant numbers, their locations, point of entry within Lao People's Democratic Republic, and the industry they have been working in abroad. Employers have indicated a need for higher skilled workers in specific industries. Returning migrants may be able to fill this gap. In addition to the higher skill set, it was acknowledged that these workers also bring a wider general knowledge, and can be good team leaders within the workplace and bring new ideas. None of the employers reported receiving information on numbers of eligible returning migrants. Migrants should be able to opt-in to this process on their return to Lao, even providing details for contact if desired. If employers knew how many potential workers were returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic from various industries. It could contribute to their plans for future recruitment drives.

6.2.2 MoU and regularisation of migrant workers

- **Shorten MoU processing times.** By reducing the time that it takes for processing to less than three months, potential migrant workers are provided greater confidence and are able to move more freely by taking advantage of short term or immediate opportunities. This would incentivise more people to use regular migration channels and provide greater ability to use migrant workers in addressing labour market shortages or seasonal work.
- **Reduce the cost of the MoU process.** The high cost of the process makes it inaccessible to many migrant workers or places them in positions of vulnerability by encouraging them to take out debt to fund their initial migration. Simplifying or subsidising this process would make it more accessible. Reducing the number of agencies in the process could contribute to this, either the government ministries or recruitment agencies.
- **Develop a clear policy about the management of migrant documentation.** Many migrant workers

find it difficult to attain and keep regular migratory status because their employer or recruitment agency does not complete their part of the documentation. Migrant workers rely on their respective supports, and when they are unhelpful, workers are left in a precarious position. Working with employers and recruitment agencies to streamline the document verification and procedures could make employers more willing to take on migrant workers and to upkeep their documentation. In addition, any costs that are incurred in this process could be reimbursed to the employer, or a small cash incentive could be provided for employers when they keep migrant worker documentation up to date.

- **Provide greater flexibility within regular status.** COVID-19 has highlighted that job losses leave migrants vulnerable; this vulnerability is enhanced when migrants are not given the satisfactory opportunity to find another role. MoU status could provide additional protections for those who have been laid off and additional flexibility for those looking for different work. This would provide greater agency to migrants in employment conditions they weren't expecting.
- **More accessible supports and greater incentives.** Because of the unpredictability of the migrant worker experience, many are not able to access the social protections that are meant to be available under the MoU scheme. Many protections are not available immediately, and only after several months of contributions. In the cohort that was studied very few satisfied the criteria to be able to access these protections. The MoU structure needs to reflect the government desire to reduce vulnerability of migrant workers by including more migrants under its protections. This in turn would facilitate formalisation of migration as its opportunities are realised.
- **Clear communication of MoU rights and responsibilities.** There is a great lack of understanding in the migrant community about the role of regular migration and the MoU process. To relieve this problem, organisations along with the government need to make the process easy to understand. A public messaging campaign could be critical in the broader regularisation of migrant workers.

6.3 Access to Information

6.3.1 Access to information about COVID-19

- **Comprehensive coordinated social media communication.** A coordinated approach across social media messaging services such as WhatsApp and Facebook messenger would help to ensure critical messaging reaches migrants. Social media proved to be the most important tool for accessing COVID-19 news, guidance and border information with 62 per cent of people receiving information in this way, with 57 per cent receiving information from friends and family via messaging apps. 48 per cent of people obtained information from government social media accounts. Given the importance of coordinating the quarantine process and COVID-19 health and border bulletins, the Lao People's Democratic Republic government should increase its social media reach to ensure a substantial majority of workers can be reached through this popular communication channel.

- **Ensure updated Covid-19 information is shared through employers in Thailand.** Internet access is key to ensure access. Survey results indicate that not all migrant workers have regular access to the internet. It is therefore important to ensure that updated information is shared through employers in Thailand as much as possible.

6.3.2 Access to information about social protection and social services

- **Set targets for employers to have appropriate information available for returning migrant workers.** Employers are a key access point for information about social protection and social services. Targets should be set for all employers to have appropriate information available for migrant workers, and this information should be shared as part of the workers' induction/training.

6.3.3 Social Security Fund or Insurance Scheme

- **Provide clearer communications in Lao language for all aspects of social security fund or insurance scheme information.** Research found that a substantial majority of surveyed migrants were not enrolled in any social security or insurance scheme. Less than 1 in 5 workers (17%) were enrolled in a social security fund. However, 89 per cent of these workers made regular contributions into their fund or insurance scheme and accessed the benefits of their fund or scheme during their sickness. This indicated the strong efficacy of the available schemes.
While a small proportion of the overall sample, 71 per cent of those workers that reported needing to access their scheme, found it difficult to access these benefits with language a key impediment.

6.3.4 Safe Migration and Anti-TIP law

- **Safe Migration factsheets and materials, and Anti-Trafficking in Persons (Anti-TIP) law information in Lao language, to be made available at all shelters and QCs.** Only a third of surveyed migrants reported access to Safe Migration information whilst at shelters abroad, or at QCs in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Lao interpreter access was minimal too (only 19 per cent were supported). It is strongly recommended that Safe Migration factsheets and materials be made available at all shelters and QCs, and in appropriate language to ensure this is communicated as effectively as possible.
42 per cent of migrants stated no knowledge of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons (Anti-TIP) law. Further information on the risks of human trafficking should be disseminated to migrant workers pre-departure and post arrival, as well as at key transit locations such as shelters and QCs.
- **Government support for pre-departure training.** Only 11 per cent of surveyed migrants received direct pre-departure training from the Lao People's Democratic Republic government. Where possible, more government support should be provided towards pre-departure training. For migrants who have received pre-departure training, financial literacy training was noted as being less helpful than employment protection rights, job skills and insurances.
 - For financial literacy training, the SaverAsia platform which currently includes remittance comparison for Thailand to Lao People's Democratic Republic, can be utilised as an online

support platform for pre-departure training, especially for financial literacy, remittances and financial resources support.

6.3.5 Social Security Protection Programmes

Current protection policies offered by employers assist the employees in the present moment, further policies could be considered to help protect the wider family and community. Childcare education and crèche facilities, retirement plans and discrimination or harassment in the workplace are all areas to be considered. Particularly noted is the high proportion of female employees amongst the employer sample, in these such environments some focus could be offered for formal women's support groups. One employer contributed they provide regular seminars for pregnant women and a seven hour maximum work limit per day when they return after maternity leave. They also provide medical seminars on child welfare. Such programmes could be considered as a component of future government social welfare policy.

Investing in family and community centred social security programmes:

- **Formalise woman's welfare programmes and 'return to work' strategies after maternity leave, perhaps including childcare education programmes and creche facilities.** Women make up a large part of the low skilled workforce and they should be encouraged to return to work after childbirth. A necessary part of the worker pool, investment goes in to training all workers within the factories so it is beneficial to the employers if women return to work. Providing education to women to provide them with basic first aid and parenting skills. Creche could be another option to consider providing a safe environment for women to leave their young children during working hours.
- **Retirement plans enabling workers to look forward, knowing they will be supported as they become the older generation.** A government supported retirement plan offered through employers with employee and employer contributions will help workers provide for their old age and offer them a more financial secure position within their community. [noted life expectancy in Lao People's Democratic Republic is 67].

Worker protection schemes looking at formalising harassment in the workplace with a complaints path laid out if it needs to be raised beyond the employer. To offer employees a way to deal with workplace issues outside of their control. Perhaps working with trade unions to provide a safe place to navigate workplace issues if their employer has no internal system.

While none of the employers raised an issue with unethical or unfair employment strategies this is an area that could also be provided for in a similar structure to the above recommendation for worker protection schemes.

6.3.6 Dissemination strategy

Facilitate local networks. Government ministries and organisations could facilitate local networks as a pathway for disseminating information. The migrant worker can often be considered a 'hidden' population and is most easily reached through networks. These networks could be formed by community groups and outreach activities. Migrant resources centres would be well placed to work with police and health sectors as well as the Lao People's Democratic Republic women's union on respective issues.

6.4 Return and reintegration

6.4.1 Return

- **Ensure amnesty for returning migrant workers who lost their work as a result of COVID-19.** CSOs reported that the government was providing amnesty for those who were returning without proper documentation. This is a positive step towards a resilient COVID-19 plan. Yet this research indicated a significant proportion were still asked to pay some sort of fine. Further amnesty needs to be granted and communicated to migrant workers and their families. Many more migrant workers are currently returning as a result of further job losses, fear of infection and a desire to be with family. It is important that these migrants are not prevented from returning through formal channels. This amnesty needs to be clearly communicated so that migrants can be assured that they are safe to return through formal channels.
- **Expand access to reporting channels for unethical behavior at the border.** A significant proportion of migrants were told that they needed to pay fines at the border in their return to Lao People's Democratic Republic that they did not understand and others were made to feel unsafe by authorities. Mechanisms need to be put in place to prevent poor behaviour by authorities. Additional or expanded reporting mechanisms would help protect migrant workers from having to pay unfair fines, bribes and from threatening behaviour.
- **Include education about return migration in multiple channels.** Many migrants did not have the opportunity to plan for their return, this led to migrants taking out debt, paying unknown fines at the border and returning without any prior arrangements for work. Any of these factors alone would leave migrant workers and their families vulnerable. Education about the risks and challenges associated with return migration will help migrants plan for this process and help them understand the necessary savings to be to be resilient through an unplanned or emergency return. This education could be established in pre-departure or post-arrival training, disseminated through relevant social media channels and distributed in host countries by migrant resource centres.

6.4.2 Quarantine centres

- **Implement a broad vaccination program within the quarantine centres.** Increase the scope of the current vaccination efforts by the WHO to include all quarantine centres. Migrants are significantly restricted in their movement and are not able to access unemployment assistance programs or vocational training.
- **Standardize reporting channels for poor conditions within the quarantine centres.** Additional reporting capability for migrants leaving the quarantine centres will enhance accountability and dissuade poor behaviour from quarantine centre staff. Having a standardized survey upon completion will make clear which quarantine are struggling to support their returning migrants and which have significant issues.

- **Distribute information about support networks and opportunities for migrant workers.** Many workers are unsure and concerned about the challenges they face in their reintegration. Quarantine centres provide an opportunity to address some of those challenges while they remain in a central location. Many CSOs provide services and supports for returned migrant workers, information about these resources could be provided at the beginning of their quarantine stay. This would allow migrants to plan their reintegration more clearly. This information should allow them to link into and explore their options while they complete their two-week stay.

6.4.3 Reintegration

- **Conduct public messaging campaigns that highlight the importance of migrant workers for Lao People's Democratic Republic.** Many migrant workers fear negative attitudes from their families, friends and communities. The public attitudes to migration contrast the powerful economic and social benefits that they bring to the country. For more successful reintegration of migrant workers and to properly leverage the benefit they bring, the government should shift public attitudes through public messaging campaigns. This should include a focus on women migrant workers who more widely experience negative attitudes upon return.
- **Mediate local employment and returning migrant employment.** Tensions can easily arise between returning migrant workers and local job seekers as they compete for the same roles. It is clear that this is already causing some degree of tension within communities, as the job market remains small and the number of returning migrants continues to increase, it is critical that tensions are negotiated.

6.5 Re-migration and re-employment including ethical recruitment

- **Prepare for migrant workers who intend to stay in Lao People's Democratic Republic.** Recent impacts of COVID-19 appear to have had a profound effect on migrant workers perception of re-migration. They are much less likely to want to re-migrate and don't intend to do so until after the respective governments declare that it is safe and when risk of infection is lower. This research indicates that demand on employment assistance is increasing and will likely to grow as business declines and more migrants return.
- **Conduct clear public messaging campaigns about safety in re-migration.** Many migrants do not intend to re-migrate until they feel that it is safe to do so and they look to the respective governments for direction about this. When it is deemed safe by the Lao People's Democratic Republic government, a clear public messaging campaign should declare that migrant workers are now safe to return. It should highlight the benefit of vaccinations and the importance of labour migration for the Lao People's Democratic Republic economy.
- **Equip migrant workers with a clear understanding of the challenges that they face when re-**

migrating and the places they can seek support. Migrants must be made aware of the options that they have for work documentation and how to acquire it. In addition, they should be reminded of the supports and protections that are available. Distributing information throughout returned migrant community groups would be a helpful way to disseminate resources. A re-migration pack of information would start many in the right place with methods of researching any further topics they are concerned about.

- **Form partnerships in education and training.** Collaboration around issues of education, skills shortages, labour markets and economic projections will allow a holistic response to these complex problems. Government ministries and the national chamber of commerce could work with and inform CSOs that provide vocational training, so that areas of skill shortage can be more easily addressed. There are many organisations currently working in and around the employment issue, it is critical to bring them into the national plan to reduce the burden on the government and form a more cohesive response.
- **Centralise information about skill shortages and in-demand markets.** This will require a thorough analysis of key sectors to investigate areas of skill shortage and labour market demand. This resource could be made public so that individuals and organisations can tailor their choices towards these areas. The platform could be further developed to include current job opportunities and make and impact immediately fulfilling labour market shortages. Returning migrants need to be able to understand how they can use their skills in Lao People's Democratic Republic, or whether they have an opportunity to change employment sectors.

6.6 Skills development and retraining

Certification for in house training schemes and industry specific government lead (or partnered) skills programmes. If the government can lead a skills development programme to increase the skills and capabilities of labourers it would help drive industry in Lao People's Democratic Republic and start to attract investors. (It should be noted that some Chinese investment is already in place in the region) Returning migrants could also contribute in this programme with skills brought in from experiences abroad.

6.6.1 Education

Education programmes could be tailored to sectors where educational attainment contributes to job skillsets and progression. Some sectors roles only employed those with a certain level of education and other sectors limited job progression based on education. By offering simultaneous education and vocational skills, migrants are better equipped to form a career in their sector and gain further skills within

their roles. For example, it was found that those working in the hospitality sector had higher levels of secondary school educational attainment compared to other sectors. More of the returning migrants were interested in this sector due to the better opportunities that were available. However, the migrants found the skills to be too difficult. The government could start education programmes which will allow the people of Lao People's Democratic Republic to look out for better opportunities in these sectors within the country.

6.6.2 Skill Development

Certification for in-house training schemes and industry specific government lead (or partnered) skills programmes. If the government can lead a skills development programme to increase the skills and capabilities of labourers it would help drive industry in Lao People's Democratic Republic and start to attract investors. (It should be noted that some Chinese investment is already in place in the region) Returning migrants could also contribute to this programme with skills brought in from their experiences abroad.

Understanding the educational and training requirements and then focusing on programmes for developing the industry specific skills can be prioritized on the basis of sector-wise demand. For example, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and hospitality are considered to be the sectors of greatest demand in Thailand. Whereas agriculture and forestry are considered as the most in demand sector in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

6.6.3 General Issues

Creating awareness about the skills/vocational training opportunities. available to workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Government can work towards creating more and more awareness among the population regarding the skills/vocational trainings that currently exist, as well as the new programmes being launched. This will enable migrants to take up trainings to upscale their skillsets or attain new skillsets.

Subsidising the cost of attaining the skills/vocational trainings. Since cost is a major factor in making decisions about vocational training, getting some sort of subsidised cost for undertaking the trainings will help attain the interest from the migrants and population alike.

Designing training programmes that would not only help migrants in securing job abroad but within the home country as well. For example, skills in entrepreneurial areas such as sewing are much more valuable because they are transferrable into a wide variety of areas, enabling migrants to use them wherever they live.

Designing a sector-wise wage scale in order to ensure that the workers receive good pay to sustain

themselves and support their families. In order to achieve the desired results from the trainings the wage scale must be regularized by the government as many migrants see the skills trainings as less valuable because of low salaries given for jobs in Lao People's Democratic Republic. This is particularly prevalent for women who are not able to make a living wage.

Developing a national method for identifying the skill shortages and then providing trainings to overcome these shortages. Large numbers of people seek employment in various sectors, however, there are small numbers of highly skilled workers across the board. Hence, offering a national method of identifying these gaps and then providing training opportunities for upskill in such sectors would increase the chances of finding employment.

REFERENCES

7

8 ANNEX

8.1 How COVID-19 is affecting employers

8.1.1 Protective Measures

All employers responded to the need to supply their workforce with protective wear and protective measures on site during the pandemic. These included supply of PPE, safety equipment, gloves, glasses, alcohol/ hand sanitiser. Removal of all cotton towels and installation of electric hand dryers / dispensers for paper towels. Hygiene education for workers, changing of shifts to avoid crossover, social distancing and new rules for dormitory accommodation. Also noted government taskforce committee inspections of the workplaces to check they are meeting standards.

Employer vaccination drive to protect their workforce. Some of the employers actively encouraged their workers to take up the vaccine through education programmes and incentives. These have achieved notable vaccination rates in these workplaces as high as 98%. Employers expressed the understanding that their staff were scared about the situation and they proactively set up an education programme.

Employers indicated government support was mostly received in terms of documentation being supplied as required on guidelines and new regulations on how to operate. Government also offered support related to income protection for the workers during lockdown.

8.1.2 Recruitment during COVID-19

Some employers expressed their own fears over hiring returning migrants due to the fact they had recently returned from Thailand. These employers were unlikely to look at recruiting from this group of workers

at this time due to their recent travel and the fear they would bring COVID-19 into the work place. Fear that an outbreak at their factory would not only affect their workers' health but also the factory would have to close and staff would be laid off. This was limited to a minority of employers but is still of relevance.

8.1.3 Challenges

COVID-19 brought operational challenges to the employers not only having to implement measures to protect staff but learning to operate within the new rules, supply shortages and changing customer behavior. It was felt some government guidelines were needed specifically on contact between a vaccinated person coming into contact with a person currently infectious with COVID-19. Employers were sympathetic towards the government dealing with the situation and appreciation that it is a very difficult time.

Guidance from the government implementing a policy on vaccination, who should be in priority groups such as there has been in other countries would have been helpful. Understand that the structure of the government is not easy in this situation, perhaps an IT system could have been implemented to keep track of this. Also mentioned was a scheme to keep workers safe through the recruitment process and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

8.2 Complete demographic summary

Gender	Male			Female			Other			Total			
	228			180			1			409			
Age	0-17		18-19		20-29		30-39		40-49		50+		
	3		19		259		102		23		3		
Ethnic Group	Lao Loum		Phouthay		Khmou		Hmong		Tai		Makong		
	375		15		16		1		1		1		
Province	Savannakhet	Salavan	Champasack	Khammouan	Bolikhamsai	Vientiane Capital	Vientiane Province	Louangphabang	Xayaboury	Attapeu	Oudomxai		
	278	24	30	11	11	23	5	14	8	1	4		
Marital Status	Single		Married		Divorced/separated		Engaged		Living together as if partner		Do not want to answer		
	150		228		20		4		6		1		
Time working abroad	Between 1 to 3 months ago		Between 4 to 6 months ago		Between 7 to 12 months ago		More than a year ago		1 – 2 years ago		3 – 4 years ago		5 – 10 years ago
	2		22		18		5		174		111		76
Employment status while abroad	Permanent full time			Permanent part time			Informal (i.e. contractor or working cash in hand)			Multiple roles			
	338			24			45			1			
Primary sector of employment	Construction	Housekeeping and cleaning of hospitality venues	Housekeeping and cleaning, including office/retail	Manufacturing and any other factory work	Domestic work	Wholesale and retail trade	Repair of motor vehicles & motorcycles	Other service activities *	Agriculture/forestry				

			ail buildings							
	36	3	4	104	12	71	7	5	21	
	Food processing	Hotels/ Accommo- dation & Restaurant s - hospitality including waiter/wai- tress	Hotels/ Accommo- dation & Restaurant s - kitchen and food preparatio- n	Human health and social work activities	Public administra- tive and support services *	Fishing	Transport- ation (tuk-tuk/ta- xi/bus/goo- ds)	Other, specify		
	5	72	41	1	6	7	2	10		
Assista- nce receiv- ed regardi- ng migrati- on	No	Unsure		Yes, a broker		Yes, a recruitment agency		Do not want to answer		
	345	3		34		25		2		
Docum- entatio- n used to enter CoD	International Passport			No document			Other, specify			
	364			39			4			
Averag- e earning per month	3,500 – 5,000 THB	5,000 – 10,000 THB		10,000 - 15,000 THB		15,000 – 20,000 THB		20,000 – 25,000 THB		>20,000 THB
	7	235		10		150		5		2

